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# **REMEMBERING THE REVOLT OF 1857:**

Contrapuntal Formations in Indian Literature and History

SOOFIA SIDDIQUE

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in South Asian  
Studies

2012

Department of South Asia  
School of Oriental and African Studies  
University of London

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### Abstract

This thesis examines the 'remembering' of the rebellion of 1857 in India through a constellation of texts, primarily though not exclusively literary, written in Urdu, Hindi and English. An essential concern of the thesis is the imbrication of literary forms, practices and histories with History 'proper' (located within a spectrum of Memory Studies drawing from Walter Benjamin). 1857 stands as a reflective space for the experiences of the rebellion as well as a moment of epistemic break insofar as it signals the consolidation of colonial modernity and its cultural transformations. The Saidian concept of contrapuntal criticism informs the thesis as it foregrounds various Indian texts spread over a century and a half, sometimes in distinct dialogue with imperial texts and strategies, and more generally with the historically constituted idea of Indian silence on the rebellion. The various configurations and matrices of silence, forgetting and speech form a continuous engagement. Chapter One studies an 1863 poetic anthology, arguing for the multivalent, often resistant politics within the conventional Urdu modality of lament. Chapter Two is a wide ranging analysis of texts from 1858 until 1888, focussing on the Enlightenment modality of 'reason' to probe the politics of 'causes of the revolt' narratives, the place of Syed Ahmad Khan therein, and the literary reflection of processes of minoritisation. Chapter 3 examines the multiple recastings of 1857 in the twentieth century nationalist phase. Beginning with V.D.Savarkar's 1909 book, *The Indian War of Independence 1857*, I focus on uneasy resolutions of Indian modernity particularly with reference to questions of violence and community. The final chapter engages with postcolonial writings that occupy a contrapuntal position in relation to dominant narratives of nationhood and modernity on the subcontinent, in which memory of 1857 gets configured as a point of crisis and of the surfacing of submerged narratives.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Remembering and Forgetting

Remembering has a long history. Enshrined in the Hebrew Bible in the imperative form, '*zakhor*' (remember!), it is central to the fundamental mutual opposition between remembering and forgetting generated in the Jewish tradition (Yerushalmi 5). '*Zikr*' or remembrance also figures as a key Islamic concept, counterpointed to '*ghaflat*' (forgetting or negligence), constituting the latter as a moral shortcoming (Hermansen and Lawrence 154). In its more distinctly modern avatars, remembering has emerged as a mass phenomenon, most often instrumentally hitched to the wagon of identity politics and the ceremonials of the nation. As Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz have put it:

The idea of memory runs through contemporary public life at high voltage, generating polemic and passionate debate in the media, in the spheres of politics and in the academy. Yet though the contemporary “presentness” of memory is evident, how this is to be understood remains a matter of dispute. It is not clear what meanings attach themselves to the generic conception of memory itself; and while in the academy there is a common belief that memory is “everywhere,” what this means remains an open matter.

(Radstone and Schwarz 1)

Indeed Radstone and Schwarz's 2010 book, *Memory: Histories, Theories and Debates* is itself an expression of the recent academic interest in mapping Memory Studies as a

field, both in its historical evolution and its interdisciplinary potential and challenges. *The Collective Memory Reader* (2011) is another outstanding recent achievement in navigating the choppy waters of memory, with the extensive introduction by Jeffrey K. Olick and others providing a valuable survey of nineteenth and early twentieth century intellectual history of memory (the Romantic reaction, Bergson, Proust, Freud), the nature of its presence and discursive concerns in the major disciplinary locations in the academy today (sociology, history, psychology and anthropology), the conceptually woolly dismissals of Memory Studies (for instance the conflation of memory scholarship with the visibility of memory in culture and politics), and also the challenges of writing a 'life-story' for memory studies, not least because 'memory studies requires a very capacious narrative indeed' (Olick et al. 39).

Within this context, the term 'remembering' in the title of this thesis requires a prefatory explanation, and following from this I will attempt to set out the informing intellectual ideas and broad theoretical directions of this thesis. Foremost, the thesis employs the concept of 'remembering' as a modality of evoking and rendering the active and dynamic aspects of memory, particularly as a counter to the conventional and still dominant model of memory as a positivistic object of retrieval. As I proceed, I will attempt to show the tenacity of this model in historiography pertaining to the revolt of 1857, despite the general ubiquity of theory and praxis that seems to point in other directions.

A central way in which the thesis is concerned with memory as a complex and dynamic phenomenon is through emphasizing the imbrication of historical memory with cultural forms. The theoretical framework for this derives from the work of Walter Benjamin, especially as put forward in the essay "The Storyteller". Exploring

experiences of modernity and their implications for the fortunes of narrative traditions, Benjamin remarks: 'Memory creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation. . . . It starts the web which all stories together form in the end' (97). The most significant contribution here is in the proposal of memory as a web, an interlinkage that is simultaneously socio-temporal and one of discursive structures, and is flagged as '*remembrance*' by Benjamin. In its socio-temporal form, remembrance is underlined as oral, intergenerational transmission, while its salient formal characteristics are illustrated by Benjamin with reference to 'epic art':

In the first place among these is the one practised by the storyteller. It starts the web which all stories form together in the end. One ties on to the next, as the great storytellers, particularly the oriental ones have always readily shown. In each of them there is a Scheherzade who thinks of a fresh story whenever her tale comes to a stop. (*Illuminations* 97)

The essential imbrication of the transmission of memory with narrative forms that Benjamin puts forward has been usefully termed 'memorative communication' by Peter Osborne. Explicating Benjamin's position in "The Storyteller", and its ideas regarding memory, modernity and narrative form focussed on the loss of 'communicability of experience', Osborne writes:

Benjamin's approach . . . locates the existential core of tradition not just in preservation (understood as memory), but in the communicability of experience within the present. Secondly, it treats the problem of communication not just as a philosophical one, but as a problem of cultural form. This opens tradition up to a historiographic analysis in which different

forms of communication appear as embodiments of different kinds of memory. Tradition appears in the guise of a cultural history of narrative forms of memorative communication. . . . For Benjamin, there is only the *historically specific variety* of social forms of memorative communication. These may have taken narrative forms in the past (in visual as well as literary representation), but there is no guarantee that they will continue to do so in the future. Indeed, these forms are in crisis. Narrative is in crisis as a 'living' form. It can no longer communicate historical experience. This crisis is the very meaning of modernity as a destruction of tradition. (Osborne 133)

Benjamin expresses a key and related view in *Theses on the Philosophy of History* regarding the fecundity of revelatory fault-lines in the apprehension of the past:

To articulate the past does not mean to recognise it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger.

(VI, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", *Illuminations* 247)

The Benjaminian conception of a historiography of cultural forms, and the concomitant question of the fragile status of memorative communication in the context of the dramatic ruptures of modernity, are two informing ideas in my thesis. The constitutive horizon in these ideas of Benjamin then is a 'more complete' historicity, one cognisant and reflexive of the dialectic between form and narratorial tradition (essential to communication) on the one hand and the historical conditions

that make them possible on the other.<sup>1</sup>

Further, some of the key positions of the thesis draw support from Theodor Adorno's work that has, as is well known, enlarged and expanded the embedded implications of Benjamin's ideas on progress and modernity. Most significantly there are two Adornian themes that I will underline in this context. The first is his detailed examination of the concept of 'forgetting', put forward at length in a 1959 essay titled "The Meaning of Working Through the Past." In this essay, Adorno's argument emanates from the psycho-sociological issues of collective resistance to remembering the atrocities of the National Socialist era, configured as 'forgetting'. 'Forgetting' according to Adorno, (and he speaks of the term in its mass practices and its public forms) is constituted of an active and interested process, and is not simply a neutral lapse of memory:

The effacement of memory is more the achievement of an all too alert consciousness than its weakness when confronted with the superior strength of unconscious processes. In the forgetting of what has scarcely transpired there resonates the fury of one who must talk himself out of what everyone knows, before he can then talk others out of it as well.

(Adorno, *Critical Models* 92)

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1 The Benjaminian concern with a more complete historicity that goes beyond standard historicism has also been treated in relation to the place of theology and messianic imagery in his work, particularly his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. Rolf Tiedemann for instance in his 'Historical Materialism or Political Messianism? An Interpretation of the Theses "On the Concept of History"' points out that the utopian impulse that informs even Marxism draws much of its energy from religion, particularly Jewish Messianism. Benjamin's language appears to have restored and foregrounded this effaced origin, employing 'the Messiah, redemption, the angel and the Anti-christ . . . as images, analogies, and parables' yet maintaining 'the secularised content of these ideas' (188). In an interesting and detailed commentary on the ninth thesis centred around the image of the chess playing automaton, Tiedemann suggests that Benjamin seeks 'a form of cooperation between historical materialism and theology', the latter animating the first, even as the first 'enlists the services of the latter. Similarly, Peter Osborne in his essay 'Walter Benjamin's Politics of Time: Small Scale Victories, Large Scale Defeats' remarks on the implication of 'theology' in Benjamin's ideas: 'Theology here stands for that moment of transcendence of the given intrinsic to history and politics alike. It can no more be opposed to Marxism than Marxism can be reduced to positivism' (105). Both these essays are from the volume *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*. Ed. Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne. Routledge: London and NY, 1994.

What Adorno underlines in this essay is the effective historical complicity of a seemingly reconciliatory call to 'forget' with an actual perpetuation of the historical conditions which previously produced catastrophe (the object of forgetting). In this context then 'remembering' again emerges as other than an exercise of positivistic retrieval, and gets configured as 'an act of social criticism since it involves a repudiation of false reconciliation—the alleged identity of our concepts and reality—and it exposes our attempts to come to terms with the past in its unique and specifiable individuality' (O' Connor 149). As a critical exercise, remembering is not about 'resentment' either: that would in fact coincide with the reductive, official view on remembering that, as Adorno points out, posits 'forgetting' as virtuous: 'in the house of the hangman one should not speak of the noose, otherwise one might seem to harbour resentment' (*Critical Models* 89). Rather it constitutes essentially a salutary and vigilant posture against totalising and totalitarian constructs and discourses.

Two further related and significant thoughts for which I refer to Adorno are his development of Benjamin's critique of historicism, and his invocation of the idea of exile. Regarding the first:

If Benjamin said that history had hitherto been written from the standpoint of the victor, and needed to be written from the standpoint of the vanquished, we might add that knowledge must indeed present the fatally rectilinear succession of victory and defeat, but should also address itself to those things which were not embraced by this dynamic, which fell by the wayside—what might be called the waste products and blind spots that have escaped the dialectic.

(*Minima Moralia* No.98, 151)

An important way in which this insight informs my thesis is in its focus on historical and cultural phenomena that defy analysis within absolute binaries such as victory/defeat, dominant-elite/subaltern, loyal/disloyal. Instead the narratives of this thesis seek to uncover and present the specificity of historical phenomena, taking on board their complex coordinates as a mode of resisting the totalising grand narratives that have historically determined the casting of unassimilated positions and phenomena as 'things . . . which fell by the wayside', to be salutarily approached as 'blind spots that have escaped the dialectic'.

Adorno's fragment 'Refuge for the homeless' (*Mimima Moralia* No. 18) is a potent elaboration on the theme of homelessness. Significantly in this fragment, homelessness is both a historically produced condition of unsettledness emergent from the concatenation of phenomena known as 'modernity', as well as ultimately an ethical-critical imperative— much like 'remembering'— essential for resistance to co-option into the mythologies of modernity. Establishing the first sense, Adorno writes:

The house is past. The bombing of European cities, as well as the labour of concentration camps, merely proceed as executors, with what the immanent development of technology had long decided was to be the fate of houses. (39)

Adorno then develops this theme directly into homelessness and exile as a necessary critical position: 'It is part of morality not to be at home in one's home' (39).

Building closely on Adorno's ideas, Edward Said in his 1984 essay

“Reflections on Exile”<sup>2</sup>, among several other works, has pursued the theme of exile as signifying a state of critical and relentless unsettledness which becomes a guard against recession into dogma and orthodoxy:

I speak of exile not as a privilege, but as an *alternative* to the mass institutions that dominate modern life. Exile is not, after all, a matter of choice: you are born into it, or it happens to you. But provided that the exile refuses to sit on the sidelines nursing a wound, there are things to be learned: he or she must cultivate a scrupulous (not indulgent or sulky) subjectivity.

(Said, *Reflections* 184)

It is in this context that Said also introduces the term 'contrapuntal' for the first time, a term that he later proposed as an oppositional textual strategy in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993):

Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is *contrapuntal*. . . . Exile is life led outside the habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew.

(Said, *Reflections* 186)

The idea of simultaneity is central to the concept of the contrapuntal, the Saidian offshoot of Adorno's critique of the rectilinear perception of history, and emerges as a mode of resisting totalising grand narratives and registering and addressing 'things . . .

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2 In Said's volume *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Critical Essays* see for instance, “Introduction” for Adorno's engagement with music as an overall enabling model for Said, “The Future of Criticism” for Adorno's negative dialectics, “On Lost Causes” for Adorno as model for the individual's intellectual vocation, and “Between Worlds” for Adorno on exile.



which fell by the wayside', 'blind spots that have escaped the dialectic'. I thus invoke the term 'contrapuntal' in my thesis as inherently informed by its Adornian intellectual genealogy, with Said's distinct contribution lying in the harnessing of this philosophical position for a strategy of reading literary texts as cultural and historical documents in colonial and postcolonial matrices.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis is also heavily indebted to the insights of Aamir Mufti in his 2007 book *Enlightenment in the Colony*. In addition to his location in the Saidian tradition of 'secular criticism', informed by its Adornian legacy, Mufti builds on Hannah Arendt's observations in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1948) establishing connections between nineteenth century European colonialism abroad and anti-semitism at home.<sup>4</sup> This feeds into an argument regarding the simultaneity, comparability, and indeed historical analogousness in the phenomena of the formulation and resolution of 'the Jewish question' in Europe and the problematic of the Indian Muslim in colonial and postcolonial India in the later nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Both are demonstrated to be manifestations of the ascendancy of modern nationalism, leading to the creation and consolidation of these groups as 'minorities', attendant with the fallouts of dislocation and perennial exile. In this context Mufti has drawn attention to nationalism's defining feature as being 'not that it is a great settling of peoples— "this place for *this* people". Rather its distinguishing

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3 In a well-known formulation in *Culture and Imperialism*, Said remarks: 'As we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to reread it not univocally but *contrapuntally*, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts' (59). Also see Aamir Mufti on Said in his essay "Global Comparativism": 'At its most expansive, contrapuntality is an argument about the nature of culture in the modern era' (115).

4 For Hannah Arendt on the definitive role of 'race-thinking' in nineteenth century imperialism, particularly with reference to India, see for instance the section titled 'Race-Thinking before Racism' in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: 'The policy[on India] introduced by Disraeli signified the establishment of an exclusive caste in a foreign country whose only function was rule and not colonisation. For the realisation of this conception which Disraeli did not live to see accomplished, racism would indeed be an indispensable tool. It foreshadowed the menacing transformation of the people from a nation into an "unmixed race of a first organisation" that felt itself to be "the aristocracy of nature"—to repeat in Disraeli's own words quoted above' (240-241).

mark historically has been precisely that it makes large numbers of people eminently unsettled'(13). 'Minority' in this relation is configured as standing in a disruptive relation to state narratives and practices, as 'always potentially exile' (12-13). Hence, Aamir Mufti's book is concerned with 'the manner in which the effects of minority experience are produced' (12), for which he extends the phenomenon of 'a possible uprooting of populations', of physical partitions, into operations of the uprootings and partitions 'of linguistic and cultural practices, and of narratives and memories of collective life' (13).

In his evocation of memories of collective life however, Mufti distinguishes his work from that of Pierre Nora which appears to make a stable distinction between memory and history.<sup>5</sup> Instead he posits 'minority as a place of disruption of that distinction', aiming to 'affiliate critical practice itself to these disruptive forms of remembering' (13). This basic assertion of the imbrication of history and memory made perceptible through the trajectories of cultural narratives—reflecting Benjamin's configuration of narrative forms, memory and history—is a key informing position in the employment of 'memory' in this thesis. Hence while at the level of critical practice, memory is the conceptual counter to the 'rectilinearity' of received history, at the same time in a necessarily related position memory *is* constitutively a distinctly historical product.

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5 The oppositional casting of memory and history informing Nora's framework is seen for instance in the following: 'Memory being a phenomenon of emotion and magic, accommodates only those facts that suit it. It thrives on vague, telescopic reminiscences, on hazy general impressions or specific symbolic details. It is vulnerable to transferences, screen memories, censorings, and projections of all kinds. History, being an intellectual, non-religious activity, calls for analysis and critical discourse. Memory situates remembrance in a sacred context. History ferrets it out; it turns whatever it touches into prose' (Nora 3).

### 1857, Historiography and Memorative Communication

Writing in 1979, S.B. Chaudhuri in his *English Historical Writings on the Indian Mutiny 1857-1859* noted a seemingly inexplicable stasis and convergence in histories of the rebellion from the immediate aftermath up till the middle of the twentieth century and beyond:

It appears that the same view as held by Minturn [that it was essentially a military mutiny and not a popular rebellion] was repeated almost exactly in the same way after a century in 1957. R.C. Majumdar delivered the same judgement after measuring the extent of the area covered by the rebellion and raising the same questions as did Minturn. Many other Indian historians also subscribed to the views of Minturn and Majumdar. Similarly what S.N. Sen feared that 'the mutiny leaders would have set the clock back', was exactly the reaction of Minturn who also remarked: 'A movement which, had it succeeded, would have thrown India back to the state in which it was after Nadir Shah's conquest'. (Chaudhuri 16)

Moving from the specific question of the assessment of the 'character' of the rebellion by English and Indian historians on both sides of the chronological divide (colonial and postcolonial), Chaudhuri perceptively focusses on the repeatability of the mutiny narrative:

It is strange that a subject ploughed for more than a century by hundreds of writers, continued to be studied much in the same form from the beginning to

the end. There has been very few development of ideas [sic], almost all the issues which were discussed at that time in the early stages of the revolt have the same priority in modern studies also, its feudal, national, or military aspects. . . . The facile argument that the sudden revolt of India had aroused so much passion and racial or national feelings that to very few historians it could be a subject for objective treatment does not cover all the issues of the case and cannot explain the surprising consistency of views between the Western writers of 1857 and the Indian writers of 1957 who had the undoubted advantage of making an objective study on the basis of accumulated knowledge of the past and a wider range of materials.

(Chaudhuri 16-17)

While Chaudhuri's subject in this study are the English historical writings in the immediate aftermath of the rebellion, this passing observation in the introductory pages constitutes a valuable, if rare, articulation of 1857 as subject to a historiographical impasse in post-colonial India.

Ten years later in 1989, the idea of 1857 as a persisting historiographical concern once again surfaces in a piece written by Sumit Sarkar—a detailed afterword to a new edition of E.J. Thompson's 1925 book on the mutiny.<sup>6</sup> Sarkar's essential interest in this forty-four page essay is in reading *The Other Side of the Medal* as 'a significant text that embodies liberal British perceptions about colonial India during

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6 In 1925 Edward J. Thompson (1886-1946), teaching missionary in India till 1923 and political liberal, published *The Other Side of the Medal*, a radical indictment of the British cult of the Mutiny. Thompson placed mainstream discourse on 1857—the fiction, the histories and letters—at the centre of his 'first and sensational bid at something like an inversion of established British Indian historiography' (Sarkar, "Afterword" 83). Though his liberal-moderate politics determines an essential concern with the continuance of British rule, this work, intended for the ruling race is an unsparing expose of the pious violence of mutiny reminiscence and the partiality of mutiny history. Thompson here posits Indian subjectivity both as a wronged and humiliated recipient of British mutiny discourse and, significantly, as a bearer of silent but persistent memories of 1857.

the inter-war years' (87), the 'contradictory, indeed tortured, sensibility' (88) that it reveals. However, before proceeding on this track he briefly assesses other claims and potentialities of the text:

The *Other Side* does contain a few passages which can strengthen the argument that “the movement was popular, a real war for independence” rather than a “merely. . . military mutiny,” but evidence for this was already voluminous in the pages of Kaye, and the reader interested in such problems can anyway turn today to numerous collections of published sources, like the massive Uttar Pradesh's *History of the Freedom Movement* volumes. More significant and thought-provoking is the emphasis upon the persistence of Mutiny memories: the fascinating story, for instance, which Thompson cites from a very anti-Indian missionary account, of how Indian Christian pupils, asked to write an essay on the mutiny, all sent in sheets of blank paper in “a silent, unanimous and unapologetic refusal to perform the task.” The theme has been sadly neglected in conventional historiography, for which nationalism begins with the educated middle class founding the Congress. The recent vogue for the study of subaltern perceptions might well find such hints worthy of greater attention.

(Sarkar, “Afterword” 87)

Sarkar's remarks indicate the two directions that conventional historical treatments of 1857 appear to have taken: the first is a partly repetitious exercise of marshalling 'evidence' to establish the popular character of the Revolt, and the second is the configuration of the rebellion locating it essentially outside of the dominant narrative of Indian nationalism. While both these directions broadly constitute a historiographical concern, the first arises out of a positivistic emphasis whose

'promise' is belied by the non-production of distinct and new narratives, while the second emerges from the dominance of a particular (nationalistic) narrative that appears to have failed to note aspects and experiences that fell outside of its constitutive ambit, the 'things . . . that fell by the wayside' in Adorno's terms. 'The persistence of Mutiny memories' then appears as a potential site of an alternative narrative which Sarkar seems to suggest would be an apt project for the Subaltern historians.

In 1998, Rudrangshu Mukherjee in his book *Spectre of Violence: The 1857 Kanpur Massacres* reviewed the historiography of the revolt<sup>7</sup>, and in the "Introduction" to a reprint in 2007, revisited and refocussed on some key questions pertaining to Indian histories. Commenting on the histories of S.N. Sen (Government sponsored, 1957), R.C. Majumdar (formally free from official sponsorship, 1957), and P.C. Gupta (1963)<sup>8</sup>, he writes:

After describing the massacre, Gupta turned his attention completely to British counter-insurgency measures, and his narrative followed Neill's path from Allahabad to Fatehpur to Kanpur. The Bibighur massacre he described largely through the words of Shepherd and Sherer. In Sen, Majumdar and Gupta—the three Indian professional historians who wrote on the uprising—there was a tendency to gloss over the violence in Kanpur. They refused to engage with the subject to discover its significance and meaning for the rebels. It was put aside as a very unpleasant episode. There was more here than a recoiling in horror.

The historians prided themselves on their adherence to facts and to objectivity.

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<sup>7</sup> See in particular the chapter 'The Histories' (118-155).

<sup>8</sup> Sen, S.N. *1857*. Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, 1957; Majumdar, R.C. *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*. Calcutta : K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1963 [first published 1957]; Gupta, P.C. *Nana Sahib and the Rising at Cawnpore*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1963.

The ghost of Ranke walked beside them. Empiricism did not permit them to go beyond the documents available to them.

. . . . They were more concerned with expressing regret, condemnation, establishing guilt and apportioning blame. (Mukherjee 153-154)

Some key points that emerge from Mukherjee's assessment of the Indian histories are as follows. First, in various small details as well as in the broad contours of the narratives the close patterning, indeed the dependence of Indian historians on colonial histories establishes a problematic convergence between them.<sup>9</sup> Second, this lack of original narratives, insofar as it emanates from an empiricist insistence on 'documents' appears to be restrictively 'historical'. Third, even while on the one hand the limitations of 1857 histories seem to be conventionally validated by appearing scrupulously bound by the historian's craft, on the other the Indian histories also manifest clearly subjective stances that on their own account come in the way of a professional engagement with the rebellion (the setting aside of these episodes as 'unpleasant', and the 'judicial discourse' being two such instances). This duality leads to the paradox of 1857 histories being simultaneously 'too' historical (in their restrictive reliance on documentation that has become in practice a perpetuation of the

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9 For this as a more general feature of historiography pertaining to nineteenth century Indian rebellions, see the seminal article by Ranajit Guha titled "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency" (Guha 1983). Guha analyses the characteristic situation of popular rebellions in colonial historiography, where primary and secondary accounts appear to overlap as the nineteenth century colonial administrator is also often the historian of rebellion, or the latter in any case derives his narrative from primary official accounts and shares their implicit investment in counter-insurgency. Crucially, Guha points out the problematic of tertiary historians failing to take note of the heavily inflected nature of primary documents in this context, and subsequently of secondary writing too, so that narratives gleaned from those tend to get perpetuated under the mistaken garb of objectivity: 'If historians fail to take notice of these tell-tale signs branded on the staple of their trade, that is a fact which must be explained in terms of the optics of a colonialist historiography rather than construed in favour of the presumed objectivity of their 'primary sources' (17). The perpetuation of colonialist historiography into post-Independence India and across radically different ideological locations is a point Guha makes by comparing two accounts of Santal hool, appearing in 1855 and 1966 respectively: 'Yet these two types, so very different from and contrary to each other in ideological orientation, have much else that is in common between them. . . . The texts echo each other as narratives. . . . There is thus little in the description of this particular event which differs significantly between the secondary and tertiary types of discourse' (28).

British mutiny narrative), and not historical enough (for political choices continue to definitively inform the constitution of 'the view of the observable'—Mukherjee's invocation of a phrase from Gyan Pandey). Hence, as Mukherjee writes in the opening sentence of the Introduction to the 2007 edition:

The truth is that the revolt of 1857 has not evoked a great deal of interest and enthusiasm among Indian historians. (Mukherjee xv)

Moreover an interesting dialectic is created between Mukherjee's 1998 text with its original treatment of extant histories on the one hand, and the 2007 Introduction that reviews of some of the premises of radical historiography on the other. In his book Mukherjee focusses the question of the inadequacy of Indian historians primarily on the issue of their inability to write non-judgementally about rebel violence:

Indian historians also failed to make rebel violence their subject. They wrote with a thinly veiled contempt for the activity of the rebels. . . . Writing after Independence as historians of a new nation committed to democracy, modernity and at looking at events through the filter of non-violence, Sen et al failed to find a site from which to write rationally about the massacres. The massacres were not a past that could be made into a present.

(Mukherjee 155)

Writing in 2007, Mukherjee occupies a more nuanced and qualified position regarding the problematic of violence in history, taking the question beyond that of the 'failure' of conventional historians to empathise with the rebels or their inability to find a discursive locus for making it integral to their narratives:



The historians' approach to the violence witnessed in 1857 cannot remain unaffected by the violence witnessed at the beginning of the new century. The rise of global terror and the use of violence by a global superpower to eradicate terrorism haunt our lives and should therefore force historians to rethink the way they have approached violence in general, and rebel violence in particular. Radical historiography, in which tradition my own work on 1857 is, I think, situated, privileged rebel violence because it saw it as a viable, perhaps only, modality to invert the structure of domination and subordination. The violence inherent in counter-insurgency was, on the other hand, seen as necessary to preserve British rule since, as a despotism it had no other means to preserve its authority when faced by a rebellion. The ethical question concerning violence was thus sidestepped. Contemporary events might force us to rethink this approach. (Mukherjee xx)

This relatively recent recognition in the work of a radical historian of 1857 is significant in its restoration of the ethics of violence into the essential configuration of the historiography of 1857. As I demonstrate in Chapter Three, "Remembering as Recovery", 'the ethical question concerning violence' in relation to 1857 in a critical way informs, permeates and is imbricated with Indian nationalist discourse across the various forms it takes (Savarkarite, Gandhian and Nehruvian) rather than being merely incidental to, or suddenly emergent vis-à-vis a pre-existing and conceptually autonomous 'new nation committed to democracy, modernity and at looking at events through the filter of non-violence' (Mukherjee 155). Instead what this chapter hopes to show is that discourses of Indian democracy, modernity and most certainly non-violence have significant originary and ideological coordinates in historical and historiographical memories of the violence of 1857.

Dipesh Chakravarty's 2007 article "Remembering 1857: An Introductory Note"<sup>10</sup> also brings into focus several important issues and challenges in the historiography of and the academic discourse around 1857. Chakravarty's piece appears to hold promise due to the theoretical centrality it gives to memory and memory practices. However, on several counts the potentiality of this move is undermined in this essay, culminating in the declaration: 'My conclusion then is: we have no memories of 1857' (1693). Chakravarty reaches this conclusion through several strains of reasoning, and I will focus here on some of the most key and problematic arguments. First, the opening and most crucial section of the article, 'Memory and the Question of Forgetting 1857', problematically performs a conceptual collapsing of contemporary memory into 'personal grief': posited as 'irretrievably lost', this eventually becomes the premise of an underlying positivist quest that is pre-configured to fail, and leads to the absolute conclusion that 'we have no memories of 1857'. 'Personal grief' here operates as a de-historicised and absolute category, effacing the relations of power determining levels of representation, expression and discursive domination, as well as crucially the very formation of the personal and the public. Further, this excessive emphasis on personal grief also needs to be read in relation to a dominant colonialist trope regarding the privatisation and inaccessibility of 'native' thought on the rebellion. As I show in my thesis, and in particular detail argue in the second chapter, "Remembering through Reason", this trope is more an effect of colonial discourse than actual fact and has historically operated against available evidence in the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

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10 In a special issue of *Economic and Political Weekly* on 1857.

11 The complicated construction of native reticence ('silence') on the rebellion can be seen even in relation to the radical *Other Side of the Medal* by E.J. Thompson: while on the one hand clearly set forth as the impact of imperial repression: 'Right at the back of the mind of many an Indian the Mutiny flits as he talks with an Englishman—an unavenged and unappeased ghost'(Thompson 12), on the other in the preface to an American edition of the book, Thompson seems to identify it as a desideratum for

Second, for an article concerned with the (non-)availability of memories, there is a striking absence of reference to any North Indian cultural production, the logical locus of immediate and transmitted memory. Instead, Chakrabarty through two expansive passages on Tagore's *Gora* advances a broad and somewhat tenuous reading about Gora's 'grief' as a child born of Irish parents who had died in the mutiny.<sup>12</sup> Third, the key binary that Chakrabarty sets out in this essay is between the domestication of 1857 in the ceremonials of the post-colonial nation and its insurrectionist value. The argument is that since there are 'no memories' of 1857, there is only commemorative or metonymic significance to remembering 1857—the first as part of state ceremonials, the second as a codified call to insurgency in general. Surprisingly Chakrabarty configures the metonymic value of 1857 as a call for insurrection only with reference to 'the colonialist's side' and 'that of the Historian of the left', missing the Savarkarite wresting and inversion of the British mutiny narrative in his *War of Indian Independence 1857* (1909). Savarkar's text constitutes not only the most definitive and dramatic point in the seizing of 1857 as an insurrectionist narrative, but more crucially raises a gamut of nuanced questions about the relation of an ideological ratification of violence and the ideas of Indian nationhood, suggestive of ideational tensions within the national(/ist) and insurrectionist as a complicated discursive configuration, rather than a simple binary constituted of mutually exclusive narratives. This discursive configuration plotted around 1857 is what I explore in Chapter Three.

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Indians : 'This book sets out matters which no Indian could, or perhaps should, set out . . . ' (Parry 158).

12 'It was as if only by making the grief of the Irish family (including his own) unavailable to any order of signs that Gora could bring his identity as Indian within the sphere of representation' (1693).

A significant intervention in the problematic of historical and scholarly aridity regarding the rebellion was made in 2000 by Amitav Ghosh, when in a series of e-mails exchanged with Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ghosh probed the 'resounding silence on this subject [1857] in *Provincializing Europe* (as in so much else that has been written by the Subalterns)' (147-48).<sup>13</sup> Ghosh reads the issue as one concerning the nature of Indian (and particularly Bengali bhadralok) silence regarding the anguish of colonial, racial domination. He further proposes that historically, Bengali silence on questions of subjection was reflective of the need to maintain precarious versions of colonial modernity that had been painstakingly created by them. Suggesting that this refusal 'to represent [subordination] to oneself' may have amounted to a mode of 'assimilating' it (161), Ghosh focusses on the co-optive implications of participating in the liberal discourse complicit in Empire. Crucially then he suggests a historically constituted line of continuity between colonial bhadralok denial of oppression on the one hand, and the silences of post-colonial, liberal scholarship extending to and including the work of the Subaltern historians, on the other.

These silences according to Ghosh appear to intensify and coagulate particularly around the rebellion of 1857. Thus 1857 while constituted at one level as an arch-instance of insurrection in modern India, is at another effaced by historicist liberal narratives. This incisive and thorough critique of the Subaltern historians' substantive disengagement with the rebellion, coming more than a decade after Sumit Sarkar's suggestion of its aptness for study by the collective is complemented by Ghosh's own treatment of the rebellion in his *Glass Palace*, published the same year. I read this treatment of the rebellion, and of related questions of modernity and

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13 Ghosh, Amitav and Dipesh Chakrabarty. "A Correspondence on Provincialising Europe". *Radical History Review* 83 (Spring 2002): 146-72.

subaltern consciousness in Chapter Four of the thesis. Of crucial significance in this reading is the issue of submerged memories overlaid by the 'forgettings' induced by the hegemonic structures of colonial modernity, flashing forth in a moment of crisis in the latter through the incidental performance of intergenerationally transmitted narrative. The informing tension in the dialogue that Ghosh as a novelist conducts with the Subaltern historians, both explicitly through the e-mail exchange with Dipesh Chakrabarty and implicitly in critical passages of the *Glass Palace*, and the perpetuation of dominant and received ideas regarding 1857 in pieces published in 2007, such as Chakrabarty's *EPW* article, are best understood with reference to the Benjaminian dictum cited earlier:

To articulate the past does not mean to recognise it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger.

(VI, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", *Illuminations* 247)

In conclusion then, the historiographical impasse attendant upon 1857 operates at several levels, its most distinct sign being the repeatability of the mutiny narrative across the colonial divide, manifested in a problematic convergence of historical narratives across more than a century. This impasse or stasis in knowledge production appears to be premised partly on the disciplinary question of the absence of adequate 'evidence' for the production of new histories, and is thus implicitly informed by a classic positivist approach. At the same time, post-colonial Indian histories of the rebellion continue to be over-determined by the judicial and moral elements of the discursive history of the mutiny. While both these impulses contribute to a basic

perpetuation of the British mutiny narrative, the problem is compounded by the tangential, 'fallen by the wayside' character of 1857 in relation to the major models and schemata of Indian historiography. As Sumit Sarkar pointed out, the dominant paradigm of 'nationalism [beginning] with the educated middle classes founding the Congress' has precluded an engagement with 'the persistence of Mutiny memories'. Yet, it is relevant to note that 1857 has remained by and large untreated by the Subaltern historians as well<sup>14</sup>, as pointed out by Amitav Ghosh. Radical historiography in the meantime has had its own set of unsettled issues, such as that of the ethics of violence, which have problematised anew the conventionally available terms for historical writing (as seen in Rudrangshu Mukherjee's recent remarks). The intersection and imbrication of radical scholarship with other constitutive knowledge paradigms has also delimited the possibility of breaking through the exclusions and assumptions of the latter. One instance of this would be Sumit Sarkar's own definitive work *Modern India: 1885-1947* (1989), in which the initial date marking modernity is fairly consonant with the nationalist narrative of the formation of the Congress. Another is Dipesh Chakrabarty's surprising declaration in 2007: 'we have no memories of 1857', confining memory to the blind-alley of 'personal' grief<sup>15</sup>, and restricting consideration of literary reflections to Tagore's *Gora*.

Dipesh Chakrabarty's conclusion cited above is, I suggest, actually an initial point for asking a number of key questions about historiography and memory relating

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14 An exception to this in the Subaltern Studies volumes is Gautam Bhadra's piece "Four Rebels of Eighteen-Fifty-Seven" (1985). However, this essay is also a reminder of the key problems attendant upon this historiography: the inadequate consideration of the question of the ethics of violence, as well as the construction of subaltern consciousness as limited and therefore of insurrection as necessarily configured to fail.

15 In this Chakrabarty seems to succumb to the historians' fallacy of equating questions of memory with oral history projects (though the reference to Tagore's novel clearly goes beyond such a restrictive sense of the sites of memory). For this see Olick etc, "Introduction" to the *Collective Memory Reader*: 'Historian critics of memory studies have often missed some of the novelty of memory studies because they associate it mostly with the project of oral history' (27).

to 1857. The most significant question to be asked regarding the dictum 'we have no memories of 1857' (apart from querying the constitution of the collective 'we') is 'where have we looked?' At a most obvious level this is a question regarding what textual production has or has not been taken into consideration, and which linguistic and literary zones and traditions does such a search entail addressing. This is a question that my thesis attempts to address by bringing to the centre of discussion specific nineteenth century Urdu texts, the 1864 poetic anthology *Fughan-e-Dehli* compiled by Kaukab (Chapter One), and the 1888 novel *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* by Nazir Ahmad (Chapter Two). However, at a more essential level the question that my thesis engages with is regarding the constitutive conditions of liberal knowledge and Indian modernity that have historically determined the differential configuration of different traditions and texts and is thus concerned with the literary-political history of the creation of submerged, 'inaudible' narratives. Following the Benjaminian model of the imbrication of the very possibility of historical memory with narrative form and tradition, I treat these two key questions as part of a complex. In this relation, the sense of historiographical impasse pertaining to 1857 outlined earlier is to be explored as more than simply a gap remedied by an empirical display of evidence, literary or otherwise, rather it is to be traced and analysed as a historically produced knowledge condition in a broader sense. That contemporary knowledge conditions about South Asia are historically produced and marked by the imperial experience and the problematic of universalism is in fact the significant and influential thesis of Dipesh Chakrabarty's own *Provincialising Europe*. On various counts this thesis draws from Chakrabarty's work, and crucially seeks to supplement the project of displacing Europe as the implicit, sovereign 'subject' of all histories by querying the possibly universalising and synecdochic use of the Bengali bhadralok archive for defining and

constructing Indian modernity.<sup>16</sup>

That this is indeed an issue of constitutive knowledge conditions rather than merely a disciplinary battle is to be seen in related questions arising regarding Gautam Chakrabarty's otherwise admirable book, *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination* (2005). As I discuss in Chapter Two, the dominant image of Syed Ahmad Khan as a British loyalist (and its attendant implications of being the 'other' of Indian nationalism) appears to find implicit support in Chakrabarty's reading of a 1904 mutiny novel. This suggests the tenacity of the dominant mutiny narrative, that emerges from the naturalising of that textual production, even where scholars might happen to be postcolonial literary critics engaged in deconstructing the ideological formations attendant upon imperial literary production. This theme of the constitutive conditions of knowledge and the imbrication of knowing/memory with literary and cultural forms is a continuous concern in my thesis, and is pursued in particular in a detailed reading of Qurratulain Hyder's *River of Fire* in Chapter Four. In the same chapter I also focus on Amitav Ghosh's concern in the *Glass Palace* with the historical formation of bearers of memory and forgetting, and the possible conditions of memorative communication within the ascendancy of the liberal modern. In both these texts, the possibility of memory of 1857 has its fragile locations in the reminiscences and literary quotations of Nawab Kamman, and the entirely contingent family narrative of the army subaltern Kishan Singh, respectively, contending in each case with a representative of Bengali bhadralok colonial modernity, the characters

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16 Chakrabarty is, of course, aware of the selective nature of his own archive (see *Provincialising Europe* 19-21), and foregrounds both his focus on the 'history of educated Bengalis' and the 'historical limitation . . . [of] this forgetting of the Muslim [that] was deeply embedded in the education and upbringing I received in independent India'. He also comments on the linguistic requirements for looking at South Asia: 'It cannot be done without paying close and careful attention to languages, practices, and intellectual traditions present in South Asia, at the same time as we explore the genealogies of the guiding concepts of the modern human sciences' (20). Theoretically, Chakrabarty's contribution and clarity is vital, and can thus be employed to query the problematic of 1857 and the conclusion that 'we have no memories of 1857'.



Gautam Nilambar Dutt and Arjun Roy.

### **A Note on the Chapters**

The thesis consists of four chapters, most of them examining the 'remembering' of the rebellion of 1857 in India (/the subcontinent) through a configuration of texts—primarily though not exclusively literary—written in Urdu, Hindi, and English. Insofar as one of the essential concerns of the thesis is an examination of the imbricatedness of literary forms, practices and histories with History 'proper', the four topoi employed in the chapters: 'lament', 'reason', 'recovery' and 'exile' are simultaneously discursive and political modalities. The Saidian concept of contrapuntal criticism implicitly informs the thesis as it brings to the fore various Indian texts spread over a century and a half, sometimes in distinct dialogue with imperial texts and strategies, and more generally with the historically constituted idea of Indian silence on the rebellion. The various configurations and matrices of silence, forgetting and speech thus form a continuous engagement.

The first chapter is a close reading of an 1863 anthology of shahr ashobs, *Fughan-e-Dehli* arguing for the multivalent, often resistant politics within the conventional Urdu modality of lament. The second chapter is a wide ranging analysis of texts from 1858 until 1888, focussing on the Enlightenment modality of 'reason' to probe the politics of 'Causes of the Revolt' narratives and the place of Syed Ahmad Khan therein. It proceeds to explore the literary reflection of processes of minoritisation in the history of the Urdu novel as seen through Nazir Ahmad's *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* (1888). The third chapter examines the multiple recastings of 1857 in the early twentieth century nationalist phase: beginning with Savarkar's 1909 book and moving

on to Gandhi's and Nehru's reflections, I focus on uneasy resolutions of Indian modernity particularly with reference to the fraught questions of violence and community. This chapter also includes a study, complementing these political texts, of Qurratulain Hyder's Urdu magnum opus *Aag ka Darya* (1959) and Amritlal Nagar's Hindi book *Gadar ke Phool* (1957). The fourth and final chapter engages with more recent writings across three different literary locations: the Pakistani author Intizar Husain's Urdu novel *Basti* (1979), Qurratulain Hyder's English 'transcreation' of *Aag ka Darya* as *River of Fire* (1998), and Amitav Ghosh's *Glass Palace* (2000), suggesting that each of them occupies a contrapuntal position in relation to dominant narratives of nationhood and modernity on the subcontinent. The memory of 1857 in these texts gets configured as a point of crisis and of the surfacing of submerged narratives, destabilising the constitutive assumptions of normative and dominant narratives.

### **A Note on the Text**

In my treatment of Urdu and Hindi texts, I have used published English translations where they have been available. I have used my own translations of Kaukab's *Fughan-e-Dehli*, Qurratulain Hyder's *Aag ka Darya* and Amritlal Nagar's *Gadar ke Phool*. I have also provided transliterations wherever it seemed that they would make the sense clearer. In general non-English words have been italicised, except for “shahr ashob” since it forms a central topic of discussion in Chapter One.

## CHAPTER ONE: REMEMBERING THROUGH LAMENT

### Introduction

This chapter attempts to study an early Indian literary reflection of the revolt of 1857, *Fughan-e-Dehli* (*The Lament of Delhi*). Published in 1863, the book comprises Urdu poems mostly written after the revolt, compiled by a Delhi poet Tafazzul Hussain Kaukab.<sup>1</sup> I attempt to locate this anthology in its literary-historical moment at a distance of about six years from the experience of the rebellion and propose that, insofar as 1857 marks a moment of political-cultural rupture, *Fughan-e-Dehli* reflects a liminality regarding issues of remembrance, tradition and literary culture. While registering and expressing a sense of radical and constitutive cultural alteration, *Fughan* energetically invokes and participates in the convention of the *shahr ashob*, a poetic lament on the decline of a city, and other classical forms and practices. Drawing on the Benjaminian ideas of memory as a socio-temporal and formal-discursive web, the chapter traces the history of the *shahr ashob* as a literary form beginning from its Persian precursor, the '*shahr ashub*'. It explores the complicated economy of the lament form, which in this case exceeded and resisted any simple reading of the *shahr ashob* as simply an expression of exhaustion and resignation, and proceeding from this examines the political content of the post-revolt *shahr ashobs*. It concludes with a reading of the text as a highly self-conscious and crafted endeavour in which the oblique, even 'opaque' conventions of mid-nineteenth century Urdu writing appear to provide space for coded political articulation and for a self-conscious positing of the text as remembrance and record.

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<sup>1</sup> Kaukab, Taffazzul Hussain, comp. *Fughan-e-Dehli*. 1863. Ed. Mohammad Ikram Chaghatai. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2007.

### ***Fughan-e-Dehli: The Historical Moment and Reflections of Literary Community***

The date of the publication of *Fughan-e-Dehli* (1863) is significant: coming just six years after the rebellion, it bears the imprint of historical proximity, yet at the same time is distant enough to register and reflect a sense of a definitive historical break, an epochal change in the wake of the revolt. The shahr ashob mode facilitates the imbrication of lamenting the city (Delhi) with lamenting its inhabitants, more specifically the literati who were contributors to this collection, and with lamenting Urdu poetry itself. Though the de-facto political power of the Mughal crown had diminished practically to non-existence in the century preceding the revolt, the symbolic and cultural value of the Mughal court as a centre of patronage of Urdu poetry in Delhi had indeed remained, finding an intensification, and ultimately pathos, in the personality of the last king, Bahadur Shah Zafar (1775-1862), a poet in his own right. With the definitive and violent end to the dynasty in 1857, and the large scale uprooting and retributive killings of the populace in the aftermath, the very conditions for a thriving traditional literary culture were radically altered.

Interestingly however, this anthology of 1863 may be identified as reflective of a sense of historical liminality: while registering this sense of radical alteration in cultural and literary mores, it still participates in and draws energetically upon the convention of shahr ashob, as on the classical poetic forms of the *marsiya* and the *ghazal*. Yet perhaps this confident production of *Fughan-e-Dehli* needs to be located in the particular historical moment of the early to mid-1860s, which if predicated on the one hand on the relative distance from 1857, was also on the other as yet relatively untouched by the institutionalised calls for the 'reform' of Urdu poetry that were to

become strong in the mid-1870s.<sup>2</sup>

It is also worth noting that *Fughan* was printed in 1863, i.e. in a period of relative ease regarding the colonial surveillance of printed material. Kaukab's notice at the end of the book refers to Act X1 of 1835 (Repealing the Regulation Preventing the Establishment of Printing Presses), while the 1867 'Regulation of Printing Press and Newspaper Act XXV' was yet to be enacted. Also, as Ulrike Stark has pointed out:

Even while receiving official encouragement, the 'native' press remained under close surveillance throughout the century. With book publishing, the situation was markedly different, for the utility of Indian enterprise in the field was widely acknowledged by the colonial state. As long as the output consisted predominantly of educational and religious works—as also of popular tales, astrological handbooks, almanacs, and other such ephemera—the indigenous book trade gave little reason for concern or direct intervention. . . . There were only two kinds of books that called for special scrutiny on the part of the authorities: seditious writings and increasingly, literature of an 'obscene' or 'immoral' nature.

(Starke 83-84)

Not only the fact that *Fughan* was a 'book' rather than journalistic material, that it was printed in a period preceding the compulsory registration of every publication, and that the standard charge against Urdu poetry in these decades was immorality rather

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2 For Muhammad Husain Azad's 1874 lecture on the reform of Urdu poetry and the instrumental role of Colonel W.R.M. Holroyd, the director of public instruction in deploring Urdu poetry's 'state of decadence' and suggesting 'moral instruction' as the aim of poetry, see Frances W. Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness*, 34-38. Holroyd proposed that the Anjuman-e-Panjab of Lahore, the location of these speeches start a new mushairah series which should be subject oriented rather than formal pattern line oriented. Accordingly, nine such mushairahs were held, on the topics 'The Rainy Season', 'Winter', 'Hope', 'Patriotism', 'Peace', 'Justice', 'Compassion', 'Contentment' and 'Civilisation'.

than seditious tendencies, may have contributed to its immunity from colonial surveillance.

Writing *Ab-e-Hayat* in 1880, Muhammad Husain Azad expounded on the rupture in knowledge systems and of the traditional channels of the transmission of information in the wake of the revolt that necessitated his writing of a history of Urdu poetry:

It's partly that such people have been disheartened at the change in the times and have given up on literature, and partly that knowledge and its forms of communication take new directions with every day's experience. . . . And the manner of our old compositions was such that it never occurred to people to write about these things in books. They felt all these minor points to be the small change of gossip, suitable tidbits to be enjoyed when groups of friends were gathered together, so they weren't aware of these ways and their advantages. And how could they know that the page of history would be turned—that the old families would be destroyed, and their offspring so ignorant that they would no longer know even their own family traditions.

(Azad 55-56)

*Fughan-e-Dehli* reflects a stance removed from the literary reformist strand represented and expressed by Azad and Hali in the 1880s and the 1890s, yet it shows a heightened consciousness of the idea of the constitutive conditions of literary community and practice having got ruptured and dislocated by 1857. At the same time, as a liminal text, it reads as a strong documentation of and participation in the very conventions that it seems to mourn as destroyed.

*Fughan-e-Dehli* while predominantly an Urdu text, is intermittently a Persian one as well.<sup>3</sup> Kaukab's preface, for instance, is written in Persian, as are all the biographical notes regarding the poets, and also a sprinkling of poems. A carefully conceived and highly organised text, it is divided into three distinct parts, each suggestively titled 'shararah' ('spark'). "Shararah-e-Nukhustin" ("The First Spark") inaugurates the collection with a shahr ashob by the former emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, who at the time of the printing of the book had already died about a year ago in exile in Rangoon. His symbolic significance for the themes of this collection is clear in this primacy of order accorded to him. His poem is followed by three shahr ashobs by Mirza Rafi Sauda (1713-1781), thus establishing 'The First Spark' not only as a remembrance of the political-cultural order that ended in 1857, but as a repository of the generic continuum of the shahr ashob in Urdu through this selection from the most prominent eighteenth century shahr ashob poet.

The second and third sections consist of post-revolt shahr ashobs. "*Doemi Shararah*" ("The Second Spark") consists of shahr ashobs in the form of *musaddas* by eleven poets, while "*Shararah Soemin*" ("The Third Spark") contains shahr ashob ghazals by thirty-one poets, seven of whose *musaddases* are also anthologised in the previous section. In keeping with a standard convention of *tazkirah* organisation, the poets in each section appear in alphabetical order of their '*takhallus*' (pen names), with the exception of the first section, where, as Kaukab is careful to explain in his preface (*Fughan* 9), due to considerations of '*adab*' or etiquette the poetry of Zafar precedes that of Sauda.<sup>4</sup> In *Fughan* there appears to be a combination of the alphabetical and

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3 In this particular *Fughan* appears to follow an established earlier nineteenth century convention: as Frances Pritchett points out, 'until about 1845 most *tazkirahs* of Urdu poetry were themselves written in Persian' (*Nets of Awareness* 64). It is however interesting, and perhaps symbolically significant that this text begun in Persian ends in Urdu: the editorial material at the end, Salik's afterword and the chronograms by three poets are all in Urdu.

<sup>4</sup> As Frances Pritchett points out: 'Among the nineteenth-century *tazkirahs*, alphabetical organisation by

periodised classification, with the division between the second and third 'Sparks' also cataloguing a generic development in the shahr ashob. While the referent in each case is the rebellion and its impact, the second section contains poetry in the established shahr ashob *musaddas* form, and the third section introduces a formal innovation: the shahr ashob *ghazal*.

Together the three sections of *Fughan-e-Dehli* perform a literary-cultural mapping best captured by Walter Benjamin's image of memory as a web put forward in "The Storyteller" (97), an interlinkage that is simultaneously both socio-temporal and discursive, in the manner of *tazkirahs*. All the poets in the second and third sections are introduced with brief *tazkirah*-like biographical notes in Persian that provide their titles, their complete names, their *takhallus* and information about their *ustads* and *shagirds* in poetry. A significant number of the poets anthologised here are important mid- and late-nineteenth century figures: Sadruddin Khan Azurda (1789-1868) and Mustafa Khan Shefta (1806-69), for instance, figure prominently in Azad's *Ab-e-Hayat*; seven of the poets (Azurda, Dagh, Salik, Zaheer, Saquib, Shefta and Zafar) are listed among the most significant poets of the period by T.G. Bailey in his 1932 *History of Urdu Literature* (68-72). Sometimes information such as the names of their fathers and professional and other identities is also provided: thus we learn that several of the poets are *hakims* (doctors), a few are *kaatibs* (scribes), some have Sufi connections. Some major poets of the age who are not anthologised are nevertheless present in the biographical notes as *ustads*: at least five of the poets, including the compiler-editor Kaukab, are *shagirds* of Ghalib for instance. Still others, including Ghalib, are invoked in the texts of the poems themselves. For instance Qurban Ali Beg Salik, a *shagird* of Ghalib and an important contributor to the anthology writes:

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pen name continued to predominate. Chronological division offered the main alternative, and the scheme most commonly adopted was the tripartite early-middle-late one' (*Nets of Awareness* 67).



*Ghalib o Nayyar o Saquib se bana hai goya*

*Ballimaron ka mohalla safhane dehli*

It is as if Ghalib and Nayyar and Saquib have made

The neighbourhood of Ballimaran the pages of Delhi <sup>5</sup> (*Fughan* 146)

The sense of a literary community poised between a radical sense of rupture and an inhabited cultural continuum is regularly invoked in the shahr ashobs anthologised in *Fughan-e-Dehli*. For instance, Mohammad Sadruddin Khan Azurda concludes his *mussadas* shahr ashob with the following lines:

*Kyunke Azurda nikal jaaye na saudai ho*

*Qatl is tarah se bejurm jo Sahbai ho*

How can Azurda escape and not go mad

Since Sahbai was in such a way murdered for no fault? (*Fughan* 39)<sup>6</sup>

These are significant lines, since they not only build a memorative connection between two prominent members of the Delhi intelligentsia, only one of whom survived the post-revolt counter-violence, but also more specifically work through the word-play on '*saudai*'. Simply meaning 'mad' at one level, it also at another evokes Sauda, the eighteenth century practitioner of the shahr ashob, even as it creates a rhyme with '*Sahbai*'. Thus in a classic instance of Benjaminian memorative communication, the lines evoke memory as a web in which the connections are simultaneously socio-temporal and discursive.

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<sup>5</sup> All translations from *Fughan-e-Dehli* in this chapter are my own. The translations of the poetry are in free verse and attempt to convey only the most basic level of meaning of the verses.

<sup>6</sup> Azurda was a proficient poet of Arabic, Persian and Urdu, renowned as a scholar and teacher, and a prominent public figure of mid-nineteenth century Delhi. Imam Bakhsh Sahbai (1802/3-57) was a professor of Persian at the Delhi College, poet and writer of several books. Sahbai along with his sons was shot dead after the British takeover on suspicion of treason, and these were among the more spectacular and remembered killings in the aftermath. For detailed studies of Azurda and Sahbai, see articles by Swapna Liddle and C.M Naim in *The Delhi College* ed. Margrit Pernau (2006).

The shared registers of literary convention in places get manifested in *Fughan-e-Dehli* in a highly stylised and ornate language, and have been described by Frances Pritchett as 'the radical opacity of *tazkirah* terminology':

The *tazkirahs*' "old-fashioned exaggerated language" is thus only a shorthand that assumes a prior grounding in the rules of the game. Only a few critics have made any attempt to understand and analyze this vocabulary. But the radical opacity of *tazkirah* terminology is perhaps not surprising—for modern critics are trying to overhear private, intense conversations never meant for their ears.

(*Nets of Awareness* 75)

This is a useful formulation, and one that I will engage with later in this chapter. However, at this point I would propose a modification to the idea of 'private conversations' by suggesting that these modalities and practices may not be completely grasped within a simple public-private binary, but may be better understood in terms of a differently conceived 'publicness', as for instance in the idea of 'the *mushairah* as a literary public.'<sup>7</sup> This is a vital point in relation to one of the continuous concerns of the thesis, i.e. my questioning of the idea of Indian silence or privatisation of Indian thought in the wake of the revolt. It is a point also linked to the central argument of this chapter regarding the imbrication of historical memory with cultural and literary forms.

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<sup>7</sup> See Pernau's "From a 'Private' Public to a 'Public' Private Sphere", 113.

### From Celebration to Lament: The Development of the Shahr Ashob

The history of the Urdu shahr ashob has its antecedents in a medieval Persian and Turkish literary practice, known variously as '*Shahr ashub*' and '*Shahranghez*'.<sup>8</sup> While the Persian convention dates back to the eleventh and twelfth centuries, it appears to have become more current and visible as a fully developed genre in the sixteenth century. This convention of the shahr ashub has been described as 'a genre of short love poems on young craftsmen, often related to the bazaars of specific towns' (Bruijn 212). Its characteristic and defining element is the motif of uproar and disturbance created in the city by the appearance of the beloved, an attractive young boy. This beloved is the referent for the terms '*shahranghez*'/'*shahr ashub*' which literally mean 'upsetting the town' or 'disturbing the city'. Further, this young beloved is generally described and classified as following a certain craft or trade, with the poet's appreciation for the beloved's physical appeal merging with an account of his skill as a craftsman: images of craft, enchantment by wares on offer and the possibility of a transaction function as established codes of a bawdy love lyric. At the same time, the cataloguing and description of varied crafts and the celebratory description of a flourishing and active marketplace engages with the spaces and fortunes of the particular city, which may get further elaborated through references to various public sites, such as forts, baths and gardens (Sharma 74). Implicit in this convention of city poetry there is an understanding of the city as the location of patronage networks and a cosmopolitan centre of cultural life.

The shahr ashub in Persian found practitioners in late Timurid and early Safavid literature in Iran, as well as in Iranian emigre writers in sixteenth and

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<sup>8</sup> See Sunil Sharma's "The City of Beauties in Indo-Persian Landscape" (2004).

seventeenth-century India such as Nuruddin Muhammad Zuhuri (d. 1616), who was present at the Nizam Shahi and Adil Shahi courts at Ahmadnagar and Bijapur. By the seventeenth century similar poems, or poems with shahr ashub elements, were being composed by Indian poets in Persian at the Mughal court in the north: for instance, Abu Talib Kalim Kashani (d. 1650), Shah Jahan's poet laureate, composed a *masnavi* with some lines in the shahr ashub mode. This period also saw a linguistic shift, with Vali (d.1720) writing the first significant shahr ashub in Urdu, celebrating the beauties and commercial life of the city of Surat (Sharma 74-77).

However, the broad development of the shahr ashob in the eighteenth century as it entered the Urdu register appears to have taken the form of an essential generic transformation. The weakening and disintegration of the Mughal empire and the repeated invasions of Delhi, by Nadir Shah in 1739 and by Ahmad Shah Durrani in 1756, provide the generally agreed upon contexts for a basic change in the use of the Persian shahr ashub tradition as it became popular in Urdu. The shahr ashob, as it came to be known in Urdu, now assumed the form of a lament for a declining city.

Traditional elements of the Persian shahr ashub that found continuity in the eighteenth century Urdu shahr ashobs included the setting of the city and the catalogue of different professions. However, instead of being flourishing and exuberant the city is now dismal and stricken by economic and social crisis. Poems of this genre now regularly reflect the breakdown of established order, the infeasibility and decline of various professions, the lack of patronage, and a reversal in class positions of the 'lowly' and the 'respectable'. A number of these poems are satirical, and elements of the ridiculous, even the bizarre, are employed to portray radical disorder, as in a shahr ashob by Qalander Bakhsh Jurat (1748-1809) analysed in detail

by Frances Pritchett.<sup>9</sup> A fabulous universe of birds and insects is invoked in the shahr ashobs of Jurat and Wali Muhammad Nazir Akbabrabadi (1735-1830), the ludicrousness of such images serving to illustrate a world gone awry. The inversion of hierarchies is sketched in Jurat's shahr ashob through the distasteful and dramatic rise of those engaged in mean occupations into positions of social prestige: a long catalogue of occupations and juxtapositions includes images of carpet-weavers wearing orange shawls, cobblers strolling in gold-embroidered shoes and shavers of pubic hair composing poems. This reversal of established order is woven with references to the animal world, where 'the lynx thinks to stare the panther down' and 'the small kite dares to look the eagle in the eye'. The refrain of Jurat's poem is constituted of a variety of ordinary birds: the blackbird, the female owl, the pied mynah, the crow's wife, the shifty eyed parrot, and the crooked nightjar, each trying 'to make [their] voice prevail/In the presence of the nightingale' (Faruqi and Pritchett 1-9), with conventions of social status and poetic skill linked in the figure of the nightingale. Mirza Muhammad Rafi Sauda wrote two shahr ashobs on the destruction of Delhi, which are considered masterpieces of the genre as it developed during this period. While they do not evoke the bizarre as in Jurat and Akbarabadi, they do employ extensive satire and range over a description of a variety of professions, each rendered debased and unprofitable and represented through tragi-comic images of ridiculous failure.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Frances Pritchett's "The World Turned Upside Down" (1994).

<sup>10</sup> The various professions enumerated by Sauda include horsemanship, being a courtier, medicine, trade, farming, poetry and teaching. Most of these imply being at the mercy of capricious nobles, who are in any case too impoverished to provide sufficiently for their retainers. A typical instance from the *qasida* is: If you become some noble's knight/By the purchase of a horse,/Look not for money from him,/But in the world to come of course!/In search of horse's fodder/Your entire life you roam./Your shield is in the pawn shop/If your sword is at home!" (Pegors 92).

Several critics have argued that the Revolt of 1857 marked a crucial watershed in the history of the shahr ashob.<sup>11</sup> Most of the shahr ashobs written in the wake of the revolt dealt with the devastation of Delhi, and many were collected by Tafazzul Hussain Kaukab and published in *Fughan-e-Dehli* in 1863. Some of the visible ways in which these shahr ashobs depart from earlier instances is in the near absence of catalogues of professions. An elegiac and mournful tone appears to dominate, while the city and its inhabitants continue to form the essential point of reference.

### **'Mere Elegies'?: The Political and Topical in the Shahr Ashob**

The shahr ashob is arguably a genre with implicit political underpinnings, of which the locus of the city is a basic component. The conception of the city informing the genre, i.e. as a centre of political power and therefore of patronage and culture, is vital to this. Indeed, etymologically the word 'shahr' is related to 'shah' meaning royal power or kingship, suggesting the link between the city as an inhabited urban space and as the locus of political authority.<sup>12</sup> Informing both the Persian shahr ashob and the Urdu shahr ashob is the idea that the beauty of the city and the skills and prosperity of its inhabitants (or their absence) are a manifestation of either a successful or dysfunctional polity. The flourishing physical life of the city is thus constructed as an embodiment of rightful rule.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, the history of the shahr ashob is by and large one of the absence of overt political comment, and most Urdu shahr ashobs (unlike their Persian

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<sup>11</sup> See Ahmed (1968), Arifi (1994) and Rahman (1997).

<sup>12</sup> See Bloois's entry on "Shahr" in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, 212.

<sup>13</sup> For a useful analysis of the centrality of the city to the celebration of intellectual life, see Hermansen and Lawrence (2000): 'The nature of Islamic civilisation, at least from the perspective of the celebrators of its intellectual vibrancy, had an overwhelmingly urban focus, and . . . the memorialisation of cities came to characterise this genre as it expanded into the space of Muslim South Asia. The urban notables who abound in the pages of Indo-Persian *tazkiras* are rarely rulers, sometimes religious scholars, but more often urban intellectuals' (151).

predecessors) do not explicitly mention the ruler (Sharma 78). This in itself had an obvious political logic: since the Persian shahr ashubs were celebratory, they could be formally dedicated to the ruler and acknowledge the regime. On the other hand, as the form acquired a critical or grieving content with the entry into Urdu, it could less feasibly refer directly to political events. There are some exceptions, for example a mukhammas by Qayamuddin Qaim that is a scathing denunciation of Shah Alam II (r. 1759-1805), in which the emperor is called a vagabond (*'luchcha'*) with an army of robbers, intent on cruelty (*'zulm'*), a reflection of Satan (*'shaitan ka zill'*) instead of being a reflection of God (*'zill-e-ilahi'*: a title of the Mughal kings) (Sharma 78). However, this may have been a political possibility only because of the largely reduced actual authority of the Mughals under Shah Alam.

Carla Petievich has contended that shahr ashobs of the Mughal period have historical value due to the special status of poets, who were allowed freer expression than clerks and courtiers who kept historical records: 'Largely immune to censorship, their ruminations on the internal causes of and contributions to the empire's decline still live in the text of their poems, while they may have been erased from official records, if indeed they ever appeared there at all' (101). While the assessment of the relative freedom accorded to poets in comparison to official record keepers may have some historical validity, the freedom of the shahr ashob poet to overtly criticize the emperor should not be overestimated: one of the earliest shahr ashob writers, Mir Muhammad Jafar, appears to have been executed as a result of his open and direct criticism of the regime (Arifi 8).

Regarding the potential of political engagement in the Urdu shahr ashob, there is a range of positions among critics. At one extreme there is what appears to be a

hasty and sweeping dismissal by Fritz Lehman: 'All [shahr ashobs] are pessimistic, backward- looking assertions of the decadent state of the poet's present society' (127). Conversely Naim Ahmed seeks, spiritedly though not very convincingly, to locate shahr ashobs in a humanist framework, arguing that all round devastation had an equalising and universalising impact and thus raised the perspective of the shahr ashob poet above personal and class concerns.<sup>14</sup> He has also argued that shahr ashobs can be viewed as potentially attuned to considerations of modernity.<sup>15</sup> Comparing the shahr ashob with other classical Urdu genres such as the ghazal, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi identifies it as 'a perfect vehicle for telling people what the poet saw in contemporary life', and while 'no . . . political lessons needed to be drawn from such poems . . . the superior poet nearly always managed to say or suggest things in the shahr ashob which were not strictly demanded by convention.'<sup>16</sup> From this range of views on the scope of the form two basic propositions can be drawn: a) an inherent topicality and the engagement with the contemporary distinguishes the shahr ashob from other more stylised, and possibly removed conventions of classical Urdu poetry, and b) there exists an operative space between convention and actual statement that can lead to an analysis of the politics of particular shahr ashobs.

In fact, of course, the nature and the extent of political engagement are closely imbricated with issues of the evolving literary aesthetics of the shahr ashob and do not function simply oppositionally to form. What may be identified as traits pertaining to the realism of the shahr ashob are most visibly manifested in its language registers, as I shall explore in the next section. As Carla Petievich points out:

A striking element of this poetic form is the attempt to describe real events as

<sup>14</sup> See Naim Ahmed's *Shahr Ashob ka Tahqiqi Mutaala*, 33.

<sup>15</sup> See Naim Ahmed's *Shahr Ashob: Ek Tajziya*, 304.

<sup>16</sup> "Jurat's Shahr Ashob", 13.



they operated on real people. No longer is the narrator the conventionalised *ashiq* (lover) of the *ghazal*, who pursues the perfect, idealized *mahbub* (beloved). Nor is his language that of the *ghazal*, which was as conventionalised and refined as was the unabashedly remote world with which it was concerned. The language of the *shahr ashob* is a mixture of the colloquial Delhi Hindustani heavily infused with Persian vocabulary which marked men of erudition, just as the sort of men Mughal court poets certainly were. It is as appropriately earthy as the events it describes are brutal.

(Petievich 104)

Hence, while the *shahr ashob* inherits from traditional Urdu poetry the conventions of self-pity, emotionality and hyperbole, these conventions appear as coexisting in creative tension with strikingly realistic elements.

The question of realism and poetic convention also benefits from being considered within debates about the definition of the *shahr ashob* as a genre. Sunil Sharma for instance suggests that the *shahr ashob* is 'more often a topos than a literary genre' (73). Indeed, historically the Persian *shahr ashob* could be written in a variety of poetic forms and even prose (Bruijn 212). In Urdu, too, it was practiced in a number of verse forms such as *masnavi*, *mukhammas*, and *qasida*. The historical transmutations it underwent as a form from the Persian *shahr ashob* to the Urdu *shahr ashob* demonstrate a kind of flexibility, while generic multifariousness adds to this versatility of form. Though the *shahr ashob* is a pre-modern form, it posits a rough analogy to critical discourse around the novel as a genre in the transmutations it undergoes, the flexibility it manifests, and the questions it poses about nomenclature,

characteristics and definition.<sup>17</sup>

What are the particular questions that arise with reference to the shahr ashobs written in the wake of 1857? A critical and defining distinction between Urdu shahr ashobs written before and after 1857 is the movement away from energetic satire to an elegiac aesthetic. Insofar as satire is understood as a mode of social and political engagement, what does the invisibility of this mode indicate regarding the politics of the post-1857 shahr ashob? Would it be valid to read the post-57 shahr ashobs as 'mere elegies' (Rahman 214), or are there signs of the political and topical to be read in the elegiac? Do they constitute only an aesthetic of sorrow, withdrawal and loss, or are they a more complex repository of varied registers?<sup>18</sup> The following sections of this chapter will read *Fughan-e-Dehli* closely in order to explore its negotiation of the radical rupture signified by 1857. In particular, as already hinted at above, I will focus on the complex memorative implications of lament as it proposes an imbricated network of mourning the city, its dead or displaced inhabitants, and their constitutive cultural matrix infused with Urdu poetic conventions.

### **The Body of the City; Bodies in the City**

As Delhi is mourned in the shahr ashobs of *Fughan-e-Dehli*, the pre-1857 city is recalled in terms of an ordered and ceremonial body politic. An instance of this is a verse by Muhammad Ahsan Khan Ahsan that envisages parts of the city as a body of which the Fort is the head, Chandni Chowk the chest, and the Jama Masjid the waist:

*Chandni Chowk ko seena kahen aur qile ko sar*

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<sup>17</sup> For such reflections on the formal characteristics and definitions of the shahr ashob, see Frances Pritchett's "The World Turned Upside Down" and C.M. Naim's "A Note on the Shahr Ashob".

<sup>18</sup> 1857 also marks a significant innovation and enlargement of the genre: the shahr ashob ghazal first makes an appearance in *Fughan-e-Dehli*, instances of which form the bulk of the volume. Amir Arifi remarks on how this landmark innovation, 'a revolution in the world of ghazals,' has failed to receive critical attention though it prefigures in practice the ideas of Hali and Syed Ahmad Khan regarding literary reform, and even the later progressive writers' concerns about realism (26-27).

*Masjid-e-Jama ko therayen mayaan-e-Dehli*

(Fughan 128)

In a variation on this, Delhi is imaged as a vital organ of the country: the poet Shamshad Ali Beg Khan Rizwan refers to Delhi as the heart of Hind, and the Fort as the life of Delhi:

*Shahr Dehli ko agar hind ka dil kijiye faraz*

*Hazrat-e-qila ko thehraye jaan-e-Dehli*

(Fughan 143)

What emerges is a highly formalised schema and ceremonially ordered relations between different parts of the city-body, and the primacy of Delhi within a system of concentric circles in an organically posited polity. Here it is useful to refer to Bernard Cohn's work on the symbolic construction of authority in Mughal India, focussed on ritual protestation and forms of salutation centring on a formalised relationship between the person of the King and his subjects, and the ritual and relational hierarchy of the different parts of the body. Cohn points out that 'all forms of salutations in Indian society relate to the head, hands and feet': the head being the 'seat of the senses and the mind', and therefore of prestige, the hands of humility, and the feet of abjectness (*Colonialism* 115). In Ahsan's couplet, the body parts used to image parts of the city indicate authority, prestige, and grace. While city space is organically conceived, it is also a stylised body, certain parts of which are prominent in representation while others (the hands and the lower body) are effaced. Further, regarding ritual pretestation in Mughal India (*khil'at*), Cohn remarks that 'the recipient (a subject) was incorporated through the medium of clothing into the body of the donor... Those thus incorporated are not just servants of the King, but part of him. . .('Representing Authority" 168). This points to a synecdochical, incorporative logic to the body politic as formalised through symbolic relations between the monarch and

his subjects. This is the logic that appears to inform Rizwan's couplet that images Hind, Delhi and the Fort as concentric circles of vitality, the outer ones successively incorporated into and vitalised by the monarchical space of the Fort. While reflecting the integration of the city and a monarchical polity inherent in the shahr ashub/ashob convention, this stylised vision of the pre-revolt city can also be read in particular as a reflection of the nominal and symbolic space occupied by the Mughal emperor in nineteenth century British India.

It is therefore perhaps the radical violence of the revolt accompanied by the destruction of the shadowy Mughal authority that provides occasion for a transition into relatively realistic descriptions of the city. In descriptions of the impact of the destruction attendant upon British moves to recast city spaces, the body of the city seems to transit from the emblematic to the topographical and the lived.<sup>19</sup> Mirza Yusuf Ali Khan Aziz refers in his shahr ashob ghazal to the canal, the Lal Diggi (the common name for Ellenborough Tank), and a field ('maidan') in Chandni Chowk which have been destroyed and lie desolate, respectively:

*Lal Diggi ki barhi jis ke sabab raunaq-e-shahr*

*Ab hai benoor woh chashm-e-nigraan-e-Dehli*

*Chandni Chowk ka maidan ki pur az naimat tha*

*Khaak us mein nahin khali hai woh jaane Dehli*

Lal Diggi which made the city lively

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19 For the recasting of city spaces following the rebellion, see Narayani Gupta's *Delhi Between Two Empires* (1981). Following the capture of Delhi, there was a debate as to whether the city should be retained or destroyed, finally decided in favour of retaining it. The army was quartered in many buildings in and around the city, including the Jama Masjid, the Delhi College, the Idgah and the Fort. 'What the Government decided was necessary for its security led to some of the loveliest buildings of the city being destroyed . . . Within the Palace, in March 1859 the *Delhi Gazette* noticed "a good deal of blowing up" going on' and an operation of 'bewildering complexity' involved 'the confiscation of the houses of all Muslims who could not prove themselves innocent, the demolition of a large number of houses in order to build the Cantonment and the railway line, and the necessity to compensate the owners of these houses' (Gupta 25-29).

That watchful eye over Delhi is now sightless

The plain of Chandni Chowk full of blessings

That life of Delhi is now desolate.

(Fughan 166-167)

Aziz describes the tank as '*chashm-e-nigraan-e-Dehli*' (a watchful eye over Delhi) that has now become '*benoor*' (sightless). Ghulam Rasool Khan Qamar similarly refers to landmark spaces such as Chandni Chowk and Dariba, remembered for their destruction and transformation (169). Nawab Mirza Dagh gives a detailed description of the reconstituted landscape, including the building of barracks (for English soldiers) within the premises of the Fort. Physical destruction and reconstruction are viewed as radically transformative of life modes:

*Qile ke beech ka maidan phir usmein woh sarak*

*Ki badal kahiye jise hai dil-o-jaan-e-Dehli*

An open field in the middle of the Fort, and within that a road

Have as it were changed the very heart and life of Delhi. (Fughan 143)

Some shahr ashobs refer to topographical loci of lanes, markets and neighbourhoods, reflective of the lived experience of the inhabitants, invoked as lost and obliterated. Hakim Muhammad Mohsin Khan Mohsin, for instance, writes:

*Naam bar kucha, na bazaar na muhalla baaqi*

*Khat pe kya khaak likhoon naam o nishan-e-Dehli*

No sign of the kucha or the bazaar or the muhalla remains

Where are the directions to inscribe on letters for Delhi? (Fughan 176)

Paradoxically, this sense of a reduced and violated city-body and the destruction of defining topographical features provides occasion for their remembrance and cataloguing *as lived experience* within the form of the shahr ashob: loss is thus transformed into a potential modality of assertion, rather than remaining confined within a framework of mourning. Remembrance here brings to light that which is literally absent, channelled through the memorative literary form of the shahr ashob. The text *Fughan-e-Dehli* is thus balanced between creating this recuperative role of remembrance in language and cultural form on the one hand, and the consciousness of the contingency of the constitutive conditions of that language and poetic form on the other.

A prominent mode (intrinsic to the Persian shahr ashob and the pre-1857 Urdu shahr ashob) that is employed in this dynamic of loss and assertion is the device of the catalogue. The mode of lament allows for a listing of the objects of loss, and this inverse cataloguing, while rhetorically organised as a list of absences, effectively functions as remembrance of disrupted presences. For instance:

*Na woh gaana na bajaana na woh mele thele*

.....

*Chandni Chowk ka aalam na daribe ka woh husn*

*Khaas baazar ki zeenat na woh aan-e-Dehli*

Gone is that song and music, gone are the fairs

.....

The element of Chandni Chowk, the beauty of Dariba

The elegance of Khas Bazaar and the pride of Delhi.

(Tajammul, *Fughan* 135)

*Roz ban than ke nikalna woh jawanon ka kahaan*

*Baithna naaz-o-ada se woh dukanon ka kahaan*

*Shor har kuche se tappon ki woh taanon ka kahaan*

The days of the young dressing up and going out are gone

Those shops set out in style are gone

The sound of the tappa rhythm in the kucha has gone. (Azurda, *Fughan* 38)

*Hujoom masjid-e-Jama ka kya karoon izhaar*

*Saf malaik hoti jahan namaaz guzaar*

.....

*Woh us ke gird ke bazaar aur woh zeenat*

*Hujoom khalq se har roz ek nayi soorat*

*Ki jis ko dekhne se tabah ko ho ek farhat*

How can I express the crowds at the Jama Masjid

Where rows of angels would offer prayers

.....

That bazaar around it and all its beauty

Crowds of humanity gave it a new face every day

On seeing which the heart would be delighted (Salik, *Fughan* 62)

Intent upon describing the city and lifestyle destroyed after the revolt, a number of these lines emerge as assertive and even celebratory: effectively passages of shahr ashub within the shahr ashob, they function within and yet exceed the logic of lament.

At the same time, in the poetic configuration of destruction and death a continuum appears to emerge between the body of the city, and bodies *in* the city. The systematic erasure of city spaces and features finds a reinforcement in and parallel with the killing and execution of its inhabitants. Numerous shahr ashobs refer to the large scale executions and retributive hangings after the British takeover of the city, thus recasting in dark shades the Persian shahr ashub convention of the continuum between the city as a polity and bodies in the city. Some representative instances include:

*Charh gaye daar pe sab peer o jawan-e-Dehli*

The young and the old of Delhi were all hung on the gibbet

(Zameer, *Fughan* 154)

*Baaz maqtool hue baazon ne phansi payi*

*Naam ko bhi na rahe peer o jawaan-e-Dehli*

Some got murdered, others were executed

The young and old of Delhi did not survive even in name.

(Mehdi, *Fughan* 174)

*Kahin tegh-e-maut khinchi hui, kahin phaansi hai, kahin daar hai*

*Phire dasht-badasht tabah sab, bure din dikhae falak ne ab*

Here the sword of death at the ready, there the hangman's loop and the gibbet

As all wander in the wilderness in these bad days that have befallen.

(Mubin, *Fughan* 173)

*Rasan har ek bashar ke gale ki haar hui*

The rope has become the garland on every neck

(Zaheer, *Fughan* 85)



With the gallows as the only intact and pervasively present aspect of the neighbourhoods, a cityscape of violent retribution emerges. As Muhammad Ali Tishna writes in his *musaddas shahr ashob* of the return of Delhi's inhabitants to the city after forced exile:

*Yahaan jo aan ke dekhi jo daar ki surat*

*Woh daar kahiye jise zulfikaar ki surat*

*Mita di chashm-e-zadan mein hazaar ki surat*

When we returned, we saw the face of the gibbet

Was it the gibbet or the zulfikaar sword?

It erased thousands of faces within sight.

(*Fughan* 48)

The magnitude of the scale of killings, the numbers of those dead, and the accumulation of dead bodies dominate images of the post-revolt city in these *shahr ashobs*. For instance Syed Zahiruddin Zaheer's lines are typical in their evocation of an excess of the production of death counterpoised with the paucity of the normal resources of closure:

*Gharon se kheench ke kashton pe kashte daale hain*

*Na gour hai na kafan hai na rone waale hain*

Pulled out from houses, heaps on heaps have been piled

There are no graves, no burials, and no mourners.

(*Fughan* 83)

Similarly Qurban Ali Beg Salik writes:

*Dher kis ja nahin hai murdon ka*

*Kis zubaan par nahin fughaan paiham*

*Nahin til dharne ki zameen mein jagah*

*Murde ka dafn ho bala se aham*

*Khaak-e-aasoodgaane pesheen par*

*Yeh naye taur ka hua hai sitam*

*Ek ki qabr mein gaye so aur*

*Tangi-e-ja se larte hain baaham*

Is there a place without heaps of corpses?

Is there a tongue that doesn't produce a series of laments?

There is no space on the ground even for a sesame seed

Who cares about the burial of the dead?

The earth of those resting in old graves

Has been subjected to a new torture

In each grave a hundred have been interred

All struggling with each other for lack of space. (*Fughan* 147)

In lines such as these the stacks of dead bodies acquire an added relation with city spaces through the lack of space to bury the dead: the exhausted body of the city and the dead bodies of its inhabitants appear in a corporeal continuum, albeit paradoxical, as the normative continuum of burial in earth is disrupted. Besides, in the first two lines quoted above a striking resonance and parallel is created between heaps of corpses and series of laments, with the latter (*'fughan paiham'*) functioning as a meta-textual device, drawing attention to the title of the anthology *Fughan-e-Dehli* and implicitly positing poetic space as one of remembrance and record.

***Fughan-e-Dehli: The 'Loyalist' Lament***

The overt political stance of the shahr ashobs in *Fughan-e-Dehli* is one of apparent loyalty to British rule, or in any event dismissive of the rebels. In several shahr ashobs, the rebel soldiers are clearly denounced, for instance:

*Kaale Meerut se kya aaye ki aafat aa gayi*

The darkies from Meerut were nothing but trouble (Azurda, *Fughan* 36)

*Fauj kya aayi qayaamat aa gayi*

The coming of the army brought the end of the world (Afsurda, *Fughan* 41)

*Tamaam shahr tilangon ne aake loot liya*

*Masl hai bhookon ko nangon ne aake loot liya*

The entire city was looted by the Tilangas

It is said that the hungry were looted by the naked (Tishna, *Fughan* 47)

*Yeh Purbi nahi aaye khuda ka qahar aaya*

The coming of the *Purbis* was the scourge of God (Dagh, *Fughan* 52)

Some poets view the emperor and by extension Delhi—implicated by contact with the rebel army and evoke a network of responsibility, weakness and blame before moving on to concentrate on the excesses of the soldiers:

*Samajh mein aata nahin kaise yeh bala aayi*

*Adool hukmi ke dil par jo fauj yeh chayi*

*Kahin yeh kis se kahoon kis ki thi yeh gumraahi*

*Yeh apni zashti aamal ki yeh ruswaai*

Who can say where this trouble came from?

How did the soldiers win the heart of the just ruler?

What does one say about who was misled

Our own ugly doings have led to this shame. (Sozaan, *Fughan* 67)

The rebel soldiers in this context are seen as instigators and initiators of a bloody cycle of violence, of which the citizens of Delhi become victims from all sides, victims of the rebel army as well as of British counter-violence. Most of the shahr ashobs narrate the events of 1857 on a pattern of '*bala par bala*' (trouble upon trouble), a series of violent visitations, first by the rebel soldiers, then implicitly by the conquering British forces, and intermittently by various other entities inhabiting the socio-geographical landscape: informants, spies, *zamindars* (landowners around Delhi who could be either friendly or antagonistic to the exiled Delhiwaalas) and '*ganwaars*' (rustics, presumably including the marauding tribes of Gujars who had become active at the time of the revolt).

The poets' elite distaste for and distance from mob violence is also evident in that wherever the word '*inquilaab*' (revolution) is used it is employed in comparison to and rhymed with '*azaab*' (scourge) or '*khwaab*' (dream, emphasizing its unreality and excess) such as in the following lines from Zaheer:

*Na roz-e-hashr se kam thi azaab ki surat*

*Khuda dikhaye na is inquilaab ki surat*

This scourge was no less than the day of judgement

God save us from the sight of this revolution!

(*Fughan* 81)

*Jo ham se sunte hain inquilaab ki baaten*

*Woh log kehte hain karte ho khwaab ki baaten*

Those who hear from us about the revolution

Say you are talking about a dream.

(*Fughan* 85)

Further, as is evident from a number of instances above, the lack of alignment with the rebel army is repeatedly articulated through assertions of otherness, with the soldiers routinely referred to as '*kaale*' (dark skinned) or '*purbiye*' (easterners), thus implying a hierarchy of class and urbanity. The conservative view of the shahr ashob poets evokes a hierarchical world of privileges and proprieties, particularly those of 'place'. The sense of place invoked refers simultaneously to the space of the city and to social status, with the revolt as disruptive of both. In relation to the rebel soldiers, this tends towards casting them as both 'outsiders' and 'lowly'.<sup>20</sup> Yet another significant mode of othering the rebel in a few shahr ashobs is by reference to religious identity:

*Zabaan se kehte hue din din aaye laeen*

*Jo Matadin tha koi to koi Gangadin*

The accursed ones came shouting '*din-din*' [in the name of religion]

But somebody was Matadin, somebody Gangadin.

(Dagh, *Fughan* 52)<sup>21</sup>

However, in this discourse centred around the rebellion and its effects there is

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20 Ghalib's diary conveys a representative sharif view in this context: the rebel soldiers are for Ghalib 'black-hearted, cruel killers' who had injured the order and peace of the city: making camp in the city, stabling horses in the Fort and turning royal chambers into their sleeping rooms, they emerge as agents of the desecration of urban spaces and aristocratic proprieties (Faruqi 1970, 32).

21 An obvious index of the post-revolt desire to defend Muslims as inculpable and loyal in the context where in popular British assessment 'a Mahomedan was another word for a rebel' (Charles Raikes, cited in Faruqi 1970, 15), a profiling that had already manifested itself in a differential administrative policy of punishment and resettlement rights in the city depending on religious identity (Gupta 23-24).

by and large an overt and conspicuous silence about the British. The British are in fact seldom mentioned explicitly (only three or four poems out of about sixty do that), and in each of those instances the references are positive and celebratory. For instance Mirza Dagh, after blaming the 'purbis' goes on to felicitate the British:

*Muzdah ay bakht ke phir aaye yahaan sahab log*

*Zeb Dehli hai koi aur koi shaan-e-Dehli.*

Glad tidings, O fate that once again the Sahibs have come here

They are the ornament and glory of Delhi. (Fughan 143)

Two other poets include specific encomia for Cooper, the lieutenant-governor of Delhi:

*Hazaar shukr ki dauran-e-daur-e-Cooper hai*

*Zamaana ahad mein iske taraqqiyon par hai.*

A thousand thanks that it is the era of Cooper

Under his rule society is progressing. (Fughan 87)

*Haakim-e-aadil o daana ko khuda ne bheja*

*Tab yeh aabad hue chand makaan-e Dehli.*

*Kaun woh daawar-e-Jam martaba Cooper Sahab?*

*Ki jise khalq kahe Shahjahan-e-Dehli.*

When the just and wise ruler was sent by God

Then some of the houses of Delhi were inhabited

This is the just sovereign, glorious as Jamshed, Cooper Sahab

The world calls him the Shahjahan of Delhi. (Fughan 141)

The forms of denunciation of rebel activity and the passages of celebration of the British takeover demonstrate that the political content of these shahr ashobs immediately locates their operation beyond 'mere elegies'. Moreover, a close reading of many of these poems reveals a divided or resistant politics beneath the overt loyalism. Hence, eventually both the concepts 'loyalist' and 'lament' show an epistemological complexity with reference to this post-revolt text.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Fughan-e-Dehli: The Divided Dirge***

If the framing stance of the text is 'fughan' (lament), the *musaddas* form in which the second section of poems of the text are written is itself one that is intrinsic to the *marsiya*.<sup>23</sup> In an afterword appended to the poems, one of the contributing poets, Mirza Qurban Ali Beg Salik, remarks about this collection: '*Agar ghaur kijiye toh har ek mussaddas ek marsiya hai aur har ek ghazal ek nauha*' (If one reflects on it, every *mussaddas* here is a *marsiya* and every *ghazal* is a *nauha*) (*Fughan* 180). As a basic tradition of lament, the *marsiya* can be understood in a limited sense 'as presenting only a despairing vision' (Naim, "Marsiya" 12), beginning in life but ending in death. But, as C.M. Naim points out, the fact is that in a *majlis*<sup>24</sup> a *marsiya* is always followed by the *fatiha*, a prayer for the dead confirming the immortality of the soul, and 'the tears of the audience are themselves a witness to the fact that the sacrifices of the Imam and his companions had not been in vain, and that in their death lay their victory' ("Marsiya" 12). Hence, the *marsiya* exceeds lament in the structure

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22 I further explore the discursive construction of Muslim loyalism in the decades following the revolt in the next chapter, 'Remembering through Reason'.

23 A *marsiya* is an elegiac poem written to commemorate the martyrdom and valour of Hazrat Imam Hussain (a grandson of the Prophet) and his comrades at the battle of Karbala (fought against the superior antagonistic forces of Yazid in 680 A.D.). This form found an especially congenial soil in Indian tradition chiefly, particularly among the Shia community which regarded it an act of piety and religious duty to eulogise and ritually mourn the martyrs of the battle of Karbala. As a poem of mourning, the term refers to elegiac poetry in Urdu in general. "Nauha" also refers to elegiac poetry.

24 A *majlis* refers to an assembly to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain.

and organisation of ritual as well as in the affect it produces. Further, Syed Akbar Hyder has argued that in Indian practice the *marsiya* has been a politically reflective genre: 'Images associated with the 1857 uprising against British rule were also incorporated into *marasi* (plural for 'marsiya'). As Intezar Hussain states in his study of Mir Anis' poetry, Urdu *marasi* were shaped by the political situation of their day'.<sup>25</sup>

In this light, it is certainly possible to identify a coding in the shahr ashobs of *Fughan-e-Dehli*, in which political references are embedded in the lamenting and emotive conventions of the *marsiya*. This in particular manifests itself in the co-existence of static-repetitive images of loss, grief and destruction with an intertwined narrative of sequential events. A representative illustration of this is the *musaddas* by Qazi Fazl Hussain Khan Afsurda. The opening lines establish the dominant and defining tenor of the poem:

*Har taraf hai barasti bekasi*

*Raat din ka rona ho gaya hansa.*

On all sides there is helplessness

Joy has turned into perpetual sorrow.

(*Fughan* 40)

This initiates the account of reversals of fortune for the city and its inhabitants. In the third stanza, the general condition of affliction is traced to the coming of the rebel army as the prime cause:

*Hay kya Dehli pe aafat aa gayi*

*Chayn se baithe the shaamat aa gayi.*

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<sup>25</sup> Hyder, Syed Akbar. "Recasting Karbala in the Genre of Urdu Marsiya". Nov. 7 2011  
<[http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealc/pritchett/00urdu/anis/txt\\_hyder\\_marsiya.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealc/pritchett/00urdu/anis/txt_hyder_marsiya.html)>



*Sar pe aalam se museebat aa gayi*

*Fauj kya aayi qayaamat aa gayi.*

Oh what an affliction has come upon Delhi!

We were peaceful, trouble has come upon us.

Disaster descended upon the world

With the army came the end of the world.

(*Fughan* 41)

After a further five stanzas revolving around standard and generalised images of a desolate ('veeran') Delhi, wet eyes ('chashm-e-tar'), the marks of sorrow ('dagh-e-gham') and anxiety ('fikr'), Afsurda proceeds to the next episode in the political narrative: the arrival of the British.

*Ki khuda ne yeh dua baar-e-qubool*

*Ho gaya kaafoor har ek bawaal fazool.*

*Yani phir hakaam aadil ka nazool*

*Ho gaya taskeen-e-dilhaye malool.*

God heard and granted our prayers

Every trouble maker was made scarce.

For the just rulers had arrived

Soothing all sorrowful hearts.

(*Fughan* 42)

However, this proves to be illusory relief as the next stanza recounts:

*Phir gaya phir aasman-e-pur jafa*

*Mukhbiron ne kar diye fitne bapa.*

*Begunah aur bagunah pakra gaya*

*Jis ki jo qismat mein likha tha hua.*

The faithless skies once again turned around

Informants gave rise to more trouble.

The guilty and the innocent were alike caught

Everybody faced whatever fate brought them. (Fughan 42-43)

In this stanza, while the blame is explicitly fixed upon the informants, there emerges an underlying and unresolved tension between the British as '*hakaam adil*', (supposedly) 'just rulers', and the arbitrary distribution of punishment. Indeed this stanza may be read as the conflictual fulcrum of the piece, and also displays some of the standard suggestive rhetorical features of these shahr ashobs, such as the use of the passive voice ('were alike caught'—not specifying by whom) and the trope of the unjust skies, which I will analyse in detail later.

Two stanzas later, the coming of better, more just times is recounted:

*Muddaton ke baad phir fitna mita*

*Qaid se choote aseeran-e-bala.*

*Ab use haakim se milti hai saza*

*Jo sataata hai kisi ko bekhata.*

After a long time then this trouble was removed

And afflicted ones were released from prison.

Now the rulers punish those

Who unnecessarily trouble others. (Fughan 43)

If we read this as the sum of the political narrative in Afsurda's shahr ashob, it is a

simple unilinear fable beginning with disruption and trouble originating with the arrival of rebel soldiers and culminating in a just and correct order eventually established by the British rulers. However, the political simplicity of this narrative is undercut by the unresolved conflict introduced in the middle of the poem between the celebrated image of the British as just rulers and the indiscriminate visitation of punitive retribution. Further, this glimpse of arbitrary and indiscriminate British violence in the aftermath of the revolt is re-evoked immediately after the seemingly happy ending signalled by the establishment of British rule. The stanza immediately following the establishment of true justice focuses on the persistent image of an associate who was executed, and the lasting grief of the poet centred around this memory:

*Abr-e-hasrat dil par apne chha gaya*

*Yahan to hasrat ko bhi rona a gaya.*

*Haye qazi apna phansi pa gaya*

*Umr bhar Afsurda ko rulwa gaya.*

Clouds of deprivation have taken over the heart

Here even deprivation has broken out weeping.

Oh our qazi who got the death sentence

Gave Afsurda a cause for life-long grief.

*(Fughan 43)*

Hence the overt narrative of political events is complicated by its insertion into an enveloping discourse of lament, which provides spaces for registering the injustice of the 'just'. In fact, a number of these shahr ashobs may be read as sites of two contending narratives within a single poem: if one is the loyalist account of the justice and desirability of British rule, the other is a counter-narrative of non-consonant and

irreconcilable images provided by memories of arbitrary executions, forced exile and material dispossession. Thus the superficially apolitical and even counter-political mode of lament and the affective use of memory within it eventually exceed, destabilise, and undercut the neat economy of praise and blame, celebration and castigation in the loyalist narrative.

### **Immunity in Images and Resistance in Rhetoric**

While various entities (the rebel soldiers, the local *badmashes*, informants, *zamindars*, people from other classes and communities, even the Mughal elite establishment with which the poets identify) tend to be explicitly identified in the *shahr ashobs* and allocated portions of blame, the British emerge as an exception. Here I will examine the rhetorical strategies by which this (im)balance of critique and culpability is managed discursively. One such prominent rhetorical technique is the use of the passive voice where the actions of the British counter-violence are referred to. For instance, Tishna in his *musaddas* explicitly names and casts the rebel soldiers as agents of violence:

*Tamaam shahr Tilangon ne aake loot liya*

*Masl hai bhookon ko nango ne aake loot liya.*

The Tilangas came and looted the entire city

It is said that the hungry were looted by the naked.

(*Fughan* 47)

However, immediately following this are the lines:

*Mila yeh hukm ki sab log yahan se tal jayen*

*Isi mein khair hai jo shahr se nikal jayen.*

Orders were given that everybody should clear out

That safety lies only in leaving the city.

(Fughan 47)

Similarly, later in Tishna's poem, when the return to the city is described, the reference to British retribution is expressed through casting the gibbet as the agent of violence:

*Yahaan jo aan ke dekhi jo daar ki surat*

*Woh daar kahiye jise zulfiqaar ki surat.*

*Mita di chashm-e-zadan mein hazaar ki surat*

On our return we saw the face of the gibbet

Was it the gibbet or the zulfiqaar sword?

It destroyed thousands within sight.

(Fughan 48)

Thus where the agents of violence are the British, the identity of the oppressor is rendered rhetorically diffuse by the use of the passive voice, or by its substitution with a material symbol (the gibbet, for instance). Significantly, this rhetoric of passivity and strategies of containment serve to demonstrate and underline the very relations of power that they seemingly efface from the overt narrative of the text. In his detailed analysis of the place of figurative language in Urdu literary history, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi refers to a useful distinction between '*khbariyah*' and '*inshaiyah*' utterances: 'statements that aim at transmitting information to the addressee are clearly falsifiable (*khbariyah*), and those that aim at actually acting on him or her through language are obviously non-falsifiable, and are classified as *inshaiyah*'.<sup>26</sup> The

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<sup>26</sup> See Faruqi's "Constructing a Literary History" (2001) appended to translation of Azad's *Ab-e-Hayat*.

non-falsifiability of figurative utterances (as opposed to factual ones) also implies, in a political context like the aftermath of the revolt, that they are not subject to culpability and defence, but may in fact provide the immunity of metaphor.<sup>27</sup>

A central rhetorical strategy by which direct political criticism of the British establishment is deflected is the liberal use of the trope of the unjust heavens, with the skies (*'falak'/'asman'*) identified as the locus of culpability at precisely the points where the political narrative appears to be on the verge of pointing to British excesses. Several shahr ashobs in this collection first cast Delhi as a competitor to, or even superior to paradise, and heaven itself as envious of an order that challenged its supremacy, and therefore the destroyer of Delhi. A typical instance is:

*Iske mitne se hui alam-e-bala ki namood*

*Varna thi rashk-e-falak shokat o shan-e Dehli.*

Its destruction caused the high heavens to be known

Otherwise the majesty of Delhi was the envy of the skies.

(Salik, *Fughan* 145)

Dagh writes:

*Falak ne qahar o ghazab taak taak kar daala*

*Tamaam pardah naamoos chaak kar daala.*

The skies have carefully aimed devastation

And have rent the entire curtain of honour. (Fughan 53)

The skies, it further appears, are not only sentient and wilful, but also given to the political strategy of divide and rule:

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<sup>27</sup> See C.A. Bayly's *Empire and Information* (1996) for a detailed exposition on post-1857 surveillance and information gathering as a modality of colonial governance.

*Falak ne unke woh aapas mein tafarqe daale*

*Dil-o jigar par pare parte hain gham ke bhaale.*

.....

*Khabar na jaan ko dil ki na dil ki jaan ko hai*

*Aur unse vaise hi ab tak cher aasman ki hai.*

The skies have created such divisions among them

The heart gets pierced by arrows of anguish.

.....

The heart and life have become heedless of each other

And in any case the skies continue to play games with them.

(Aish, *Fughan* 93)

The most striking references to the skies, however, are those which avow clash and indicate challenge, and a desire for the tables of hegemony to be overturned. For instance:

*Nahin bache ga, pare ga beshak*

*Charkh ki jaan par vabaal-e-Dehli.*

The heavens are not going to escape

The destruction of Delhi will visit them too.

(Aish, *Fughan* 138)

And:

*Yeh hai hamesh se duniya mein dushman-e-khunkhaar*

*Ise bhi kaash mile saamne hamaare daar.*

The sky has always been a ferocious enemy

If only we could see it hung on the gibbet!

(Sozaan, *Fughan* 67)

This last instance takes the dominant image of the post-revolt experience of retributive justice, the gibbet, and employs hyperbole to articulate a figure of impossible defiance.

The question of resistance in Urdu literature in the context of the limitations imposed by hegemonic power structures has been treated by Harbans Mukhia in his article "The Celebration of Failure as Dissent in Urdu Ghazal". In particular he explores the relation between the poetic expression of sorrow and failure ('*gham*') in the Urdu tradition and the possibility of protest. Pointing to the sources of the Urdu *ghazal*, Mukhia traces Sufistic traditions as counter-political orders—such as would counter worldly authority and the hegemonic status of the ulama with a personalised, more flexible spirituality, and in the process provide an alternative and conflicting locus of authority. The personalised relationship between God and man, 'the experience of the heart', it may thus be argued, potentially constitutes the affective as political. Referring to the trope of '*gham*' (sorrow) in Urdu poetry, Mukhia has argued that '*gham* courts, dignifies and celebrates failure', and further that 'the courting and celebration of failure is a form of resistance, of disapproval, even of lampooning of the "success" of Authority, secular or religious' (874).

Insofar as the '*falak*'/ '*asman*'/'*charkh*' of these shahr ashobs suggest a poetic metaphor to indicate the locus of oppressive power and visitations of injustice and arbitrary punishment, the unmitigated '*gham*' of the shahr ashob poet faced by non-negotiable power, while apparently suggestive of resignation, can be read instead as constitutive of latent resistance, coded in the protest conventions of Urdu poetry as elaborated by Mukhia. Thus the shahr ashobs in *Fughan-e-Dehli* effectively employ a



literary convention of circumlocutory and figurative language to signify that, which the limits imposed by a violent and retributive political authority have placed outside the realm of critique.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Fughan-e-Dehli: Opacity and Remembrance***

In the previous sections I have argued, through a reading of the poems in this volume, for the complexity of the modality of lament employed in this post-revolt text: while it displays consciousness of a radical rupture in the wake of the revolt, it exceeds simple expectations of resignation, challenging received critical ideas of shahr ashobs being 'mere elegies'. Further, as I indicated in the first section of the chapter, the tripartite organisation of the anthology, the content of the biographical notes, and the participation in literary-cultural conventions all suggest an energetically inhabited poetic and literary continuum, even as the text appears to be conscious of its liminal status and mourns the passing away of that traditional order. In this section I will look in further detail at the editorial and other appended material in the text. These are in brief: Kaukab's single page Persian preface ('*muqaddama*') to the book, Salik's more expansive and dense review ('*tafreet*') in Urdu that frames the text at its other end, and three verse chronograms by Salik, Kamil, and Tajammul to mark the year of printing.

Kaukab in his preface posits the book in the following terms: 'Let it be known that this book that leaves its mark on the heart, records all the pains and tribulations of

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28 At another level, it can also be argued that the hyperbole of Urdu poetry turns out in the event, to be an apt register for conveying the excesses of the experience of the counter-violence. In particular, the most established tropes of Urdu ghazal such as the complaint of cruelty (with the '*sitamgar*'/cruel one being either and equally the beloved or the capricious heavens) and the exhausted posture of lament appear to have found literal referents in the experience of the revolt and counter-violence.

the people of Delhi. It is a compound of its all-round life . . .' (*Fughan* 9). Thus not only is the idea of the text as a self-conscious record bearer introduced in these lines, the mode of lament is suggested to carry within it the remembrance of an entire matrix of cultural existence. Salik's review placed at the end of the text, while written in Urdu, is phrased in much more oblique and elaborate rhetoric. At a glance, it is clear that he is following a convention of stylised prose writing within the *tazkirah* tradition by which 'many enjoyed the chance to display their own literary virtuosity by writing an elaborate prose full of elegant sounding phrases' (Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness* 67). However, a further examination of this piece reveals a spirited assertion of the power of speech in poetry and of the irrepressibility of thought. There are several passages that invite being read as a boast of having, through the power of poetic eloquence and the skilled use of oblique figurative language, escaped the possibility of colonial surveillance and silencing. Some of these passages are as follows:

*Taayar waham khayal ka urna kungrah aiwaan-e-sukhan tak faqat khayal hai  
aur wahan tak waham ka pohunchna dushwar hai.*

The bird of suspicious thought flying to the turrets of the court of poetry is mere thought and it is arduous for suspicion to reach there. (*Fughan* 178)

*Khayal ki rasai mahaal hai.*

The penetration of thought is impossible. (*Fughan* 178)

*Sayyadane sukhani jo daawa kamandandazi rakhte hain anqa ko shikar karte hain.*

The hunters of eloquence who claim to be skilled in the use of the noose hunt for the *anqa*. (*Fughan* 178)

*Ajab mardam khez jagah hai ki koi zamaana sukhan fahmon se khali aur koi waqt sukhan goyon se aari nahin hai.*

What a producer of men this place is, that no period is empty of the intelligent and no time devoid of the eloquent! (Fughan 180)

*Bawajood iske ke yahaan ghadar aur inquilab hua yeh shahr kya balki ek zamana tabah aur kharab hua magar yahan ab inayat ezdi se wahi kasrat-e-sukhan sanjan-e-naghaz go hai.*

Despite that revolt and revolution happened here, what to speak of this city an entire era was destroyed and spoilt, but by the grace of God now there is the same plentifulness of poetry and felicity of phrases abounds.

(Fughan 180)

*Zahir hai ki jab shora ki kasrat ho aur aisa inquilab zahur mein aaye zaban par koi mohar nahin hai ki goyagi se baaz rahe aur dil par kuch zor nahin hai ki dard se bhar na aaye aur izhar-e-dard shayarana na kiya jaye.*

It is apparent that when there is an abundance of poets and such a revolution makes an appearance, the tongue does not bear a seal that it will refrain from speech and there is no helping the heart filling with pain, and expressing that pain poetically. (Fughan 180)

There are a number of significant expressions and images to be noted here. The most central one is that of the hunt for the 'anqa'. Frances Pritchett has defined the *anqa* as 'a bird from Arabic story tradition, whose single defining trait is his not-there-

ness. Whenever you try to catch him, he's gone'.<sup>29</sup> The image of the *anqa* thus functions as the hinge for a double play on the idea of poetic subtlety that, on the one hand, challenges comprehension while, on the other hand, constitutes dexterity of expression that protects the poet from the imminent reach of colonial surveillance.<sup>30</sup> Conventional Urdu poetic images of the hunt and the noose acquire an additional political meaning when read in the context of descriptions of post-revolt hangings and retributive punishments contained in the poetry. In the statement '*Khayal ki rasai mahaal hai*' ('The penetration of thought is impossible'), while '*rasai*' refers to 'penetration' or 'access', it also aurally evokes the word '*rasa*' (rope), once again possibly suggesting a link to the image of the noose, and is thus potentially readable as: 'It is impossible to hang thought'.

Another highly evocative statement is: '*zaban par koi mohur nahin hai ki goyagi se baaz rahe*' ('the tongue does not bear a seal that it will refrain from speech'). Here the word '*mohur*', while meaning most obviously a seal (primarily in the sense of an 'official' seal), also seems to play with other meanings of the word, such as 'a gold coin', in which case it could suggest either an ironic contrast with the rewards on 'traitors' heads, or that those who would speak have not taken bribes to refrain from doing so. Hence, multiple levels of meaning are suggested through verbal slippages, and speech gets posited as dually resistant: to silence and to the operations of surveillance and detection.

Towards the end of his review, Salik writes in a distinctly plainer prose

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29 Pritchett, Frances. "Index of Proper Names". Nov. 7 2011

<[http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealc/pritchett/00ghalib/apparatus/names\\_index.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealc/pritchett/00ghalib/apparatus/names_index.html)>

30 For another reference to the *anqa* in *Fughan-e-Dehli*, see Shatab Khan Siphar's lines:

*Mit gaya safah aalam se nishaan-e-Dehli*

*Masl anqa hai zabaanon pe bayaan-e-Dehli.*

The trace of Delhi has been erased from the page of the world

The discourse of Delhi is like the rare *anqa* bird. (*Fughan* 148)

register than is employed in the previous part:

*Woh gathriyan baghalon mein daabne, woh shahron se nikal kar makai chabne, zamindaaron se panaah ka maangna, gharaz ke jo jo museebatein logon par guzri hain isse aashkar hoti hain. Is shahr mein bahut si musaddasat aur bahut si ghazlein is baab mein tasneef hui. Kisi ko khayal na aaya ki is ko jama kare aur nazireen ke liye ek maqool guldasta banaye magar . . . Muhammad Tafazzul Hussain Khan Kaukab ne sabko nihayat sai se jama farmaya aur jabaja talash karke mangwaya aur ek haiyat majmui ise de kar matba Akmal-ul-Matba mein matboo karaya.*

All that escaping with bundles under our arms, getting out of the city and chewing on corn, asking for shelter from *zamindars*—in brief whatever miseries fell on the people are reflected in this book. In this city many musaddases and many ghazals were written on this subject. No one thought of collecting them and presenting a small bouquet for the readers but . . . Muhammad Tafazzul Hussain Khan Kaukab collected all these with great endeavour and searched and sent for them from various places, and after giving it the form of a collection got it printed at the printing press Akmal-ul-Matba.

(Fughan 180)

This is an interesting remark because it seems to complicate the obvious consciously crafted and collective nature of the text by suggesting that the poems anthologised here are simply a compilation of scattered individual reflections, gathered with much effort by Tafazzul Hussain Kaukab. The verse schema of the all the poems in the ghazal section however makes evident that they were written to a prescribed, previously agreed upon common '*zameen*' (ground), i.e. '*fughan-e-dehli*'. This was a

common practice in nineteenth century *mushairahs*, and appears to point in the direction of a '*tarahi*' (patterned) *mushairah* where the ghazals may first have been recited. The term '*guldasta*' (bouquet) also seems to point in the same direction: 'The connection between *mushairahs* and the *tazkirah* tradition can be seen at its strongest in a special kind of *tazkirah* called a bouquet (*guldasta*). A bouquet reproduces all or part of the poetry recited at one particular *mushairah*' (Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness* 74). The effacing of this background in the framing material of the text can hardly be laid to the affectation of the compiler since it would be so easily contradicted by even a casual perception of the text by a cultural insider. Hence this effacement of the self-conscious, collective nature of the text is perhaps best read as another reflection of the measured slipperiness of the political implications of the text within the post-revolt context of surveillance.

Salik's commentary is followed by three chronograms to mark the date of compilation. The first of these is by Salik himself:

*Hui taleef yeh ajeeb kitab*

*Jis se raazi hon aqil o jahil.*

*Is ki tareekh agar koi puche*

*Keh de Salik safina gham-e-dil.*

This is a strange book that has been compiled

With which both the learned and the unlettered will agree.

If someone asks for the date (/history) of this

Tell them it is the blank book of the heart's sorrow.

(Fughan 181)

The next chronogram by Kamil reads:

*Jab yeh ki taleef kaukab ne kitab*

*Jis se zahir hue haal-e-ahl-e-Hind.*

*Yun kahi tareekh Kamil ne ba-sai*

*Daftar ranj-o-malal ahl-e-Hind.*

When Kaukab compiled this book

Which revealed the condition of the people of Hind,

Kamil with endeavour identified its date as

The record of the griefs and sorrows of the people of Hind.

(Fughan 181)

This is then followed by a chronogram by Tajammul:

*Ki jama jab ki hazrat-e-Kaukab ne yeh kitab*

*Yan fikr-e-sal-e-taba ne dil par kiya hujoom.*

*Is mein bayan-e-gham hai Tajammul har ek ka*

*Mein ne bhi sal-e-taba likha munba alghamoom.*

When hazrat Kaukab compiled this book

My heart was weighed by thought of the year of printing.

Tajammul this contains the account of everyone's sorrow

I inscribe the year of printing as the source of sorrows.

(Fughan 181)

The three chronograms thus seem to underline some salient themes: they show a consciousness of the production of this text as having been an unusual and significant project: '*ajeeb kitab*' ('strange book'); they lay claim to the sorrows represented here as

reflecting the condition of large collectivities: '*aqil o jahil*' ('the learned and the unlettered'), '*ahl-e-hind*' ('the people of Hind'), and '*har ek*' ('everyone'); and they propose the poems as a self-conscious and systematic record and remembrance of what may otherwise be silent: '*safina-e-gham-e-dil*' ('the blank book of the heart's sorrow') and '*daftar ranj-o-malal*' ('record of griefs and sorrows').

## Conclusion

This chapter has built upon two key ideas from Walter Benjamin in its reading of remembrance in the shahr ashobs of *Fughan-e-Dehli*. The first is the essential imbrication of historical memory with cultural forms, and the second is an articulation of the past by 'seizing hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger' (Benjamin 247). In opposition to the simplistic perception of shahr ashobs being 'mere elegies', this reading traces assertive, defiant and sometimes even celebratory strands in the text. *Fughan* is a highly self-conscious text that appears to celebrate the production of its own discourse. Remembrance and articulation are mutually allied in the form and tradition of the shahr ashob, whose resources are fully employed and evoked in the 'moment of danger' that the revolt and its impact signify for this literary community. At the same time, the text also reflects the historically liminal status of its cultural matrix as it straddles an epochal transition, with the shahr ashobs articulating a crisis configured as radical and affecting the very conditions of continuance of literary community and tradition.

Among the linguistic conventions that the text employs and exploits, 'the radical opacity of tazkirah terminology' (Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness* 75) plays an important, and arguably political, role of camouflage in the post-revolt context of



surveillance. Beyond its apparently defensive role in its political moment in the early 1860s, this question of opacity of literary practice assumes an additional dimension in its historical constitution. As Aamir Mufti has remarked in relation to the challenge of approaching 'tradition' from a position of modernity: 'The pre-modern corpus can only be approached from a position of *exile* from it, that is through a careful elaboration of the forms of displacement, distance, alienation—and, yes, remembrance, familiarity, and recognition—that characterize our contemporary relationship to it' (*Enlightenment* 19).<sup>31</sup> Indeed, for the modern critic approaching *Fughan-e-Dehli*, its complex of generic, linguistic and stylistic conventions, and the attendant challenge of access may well make it seem like an '*ajeeb kitab*' ('a strange book') in ways not entirely anticipated by Salik, the inscriber of that description in the text. Eventually, this then also draws attention to the production of knowledge about 1857 within historically constituted linguistic and discursive matrices. It may be safely said that one can at best approach the materials of the immediate aftermath of the rebellion as a mediating stranger, instead of suggesting that memory or knowledge of 1857 be considered within a simple framework of empirical access and retrieval.

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31 It is perhaps a measure of the historically constituted opacity of a text like *Fughan-e-Dehli* even within the Urdu establishment, that some later editions like the most recent one edited by Muhammad Ikram Chaghatai (2007) appear not to negotiate with the historical matrices of cultural production at all. In his introduction, Chaghatai remarks that Tafazzul Hussain Kaukab could, like other affected people of his times, have expressed events witnessed by him in prose, but instead he chose to collect these various poems (Kaukab 3-4). Chaghatai thus seems to miss out on the nuanced specificity of poetry as a medium, and the fact of its being in the case of this anthology, simultaneously subject, form, and instrumentality. The chief merits of this edition are its being a fresh reprint, and the addition of new material including Nizami Badayuni's introduction to his 1931 edition published as *Fariyad-i-Dehli*, and an additional section featuring modern Urdu poetry relating to the revolt. For a review of this edition, see Asif Farrukhi's "Lamentations for an Undying City".

## CHAPTER TWO: REMEMBERING THROUGH REASON

### Introduction

This chapter attempts to trace the political and discursive implications of a network of texts produced across the thirty-year period following the revolt. These texts include *Asbab Baghavat-e-Hind* (*The Causes of the Indian Revolt*) by Syed Ahmad Khan published in 1859, Sir Richard Temple's official memorandum on *Asbab* (1860), the three-part *Account of the Loyal Mohammadans of India* (1860-1861) by Syed Ahmad Khan, W.W. Hunter's 1871 tract, *The Indian Musalmans: Are They Bound in Conscience to Rebel against the Queen?*, Syed Ahmad Khan's critique of Hunter's book, *Review on Dr. Hunter's Indian Musalmans: Are they Bound in Conscience to Rebel against the Queen?* (1872) and Nazir Ahmad's 1888 Urdu novel *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* (*The Son of the Moment*).

Focussing on Syed Ahmad Khan's *Asbab*, I consider the centrality and significance of narratives of the 'Causes of the Revolt' within British mutiny writing, referring in particular to Ranajit Guha's argument regarding accounts of 'causes' pertaining to colonial rebellions being essentially counterinsurgency narratives. The chapter explores the unique position of Syed Ahmad Khan as a 'native' entrant into this discourse, and the fraught reception of *Asbab* by the colonial establishment. Identifying Syed Ahmad Khan's text as located within a matrix of reasoned critique of British rule, I suggest that it constitutes an excess in relation to the counterinsurgency conventions of the 'causes' narrative, leading to its unacceptability for the colonial establishment. In this context, the chapter charts a movement between Syed Ahmad

Khan's occupation of the 'causes' narrative to that of what I have termed the 'loyalty' narrative, tracing both changes in identity consciousness, and the continuance of an essentially contestatory and interventionist stance, revealing the complexity of the 'loyalty' narrative. In this, I focus on the uneven operations of Enlightenment Reason as an informing modality, by demonstrating on the one hand the instrumentalist functions of colonial investigative narratives, and the universalist and empirical locus it provides Syed Ahmad Khan on the other. The chapter then traces the development and implications of the 'loyalty debates' through the 1870s texts by W.W. Hunter and Syed Ahmad Khan. Suggesting that the 'loyalty' narrative was a continuously complex and fraught one, I touch upon the problematic of the unilinear historiography of Indian nationalism and its simplified 'othering' of Syed Ahmad Khan.

As a counterpoint, I propose a reading of Nazir Ahmad's *Ibn-ul Vaqt* as reflecting both a fluidity of positions and self-investigation within the seemingly corporatised 'Indian Musalmans', and resistance to the officially authorised themes of minority: loyalty/disloyalty, domesticity and education. I finally consider the reasons for the relative insignificance of *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* in processes of colonial reception, and employ remembering and forgetting as modalities that reflect the historical-political into dominant literary formations. In approaching the interplay between these various texts, I have drawn from Theodore Adorno's ideas regarding remembering and forgetting as constitutive political acts ("The Meaning of Working Through the Past") as well as the need to look beyond the 'fatally rectilinear succession of victory and defeat' and address 'things . . . which fell by the wayside'<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Minima Moralia*, No. 98, 151.

## The 'Causes of the Revolt' Narrative

In a seminal article titled 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency'<sup>2</sup>, Ranajit Guha analysed the characteristic situation of popular rebellions in colonial historiography, demonstrating an overlap between primary and secondary accounts of colonial Indian rebellion. The nineteenth century colonial administrator is also often the historian of rebellion, or the latter in any case derives his narrative from primary official accounts and shares their implicit concern with colonial rebellion as a phenomenon to be understood essentially in order to be contained. These narratives of counter-insurgency, Guha argued, are thus informed and determined by the 'code of pacification' (15), an investment that favours the investigation of 'causes': for 'to know the cause of a phenomenon is already a step taken in the direction of controlling it' (30).

That the 'causes narrative' was a favoured discursive mode of British writing on the revolt of 1857 finds support from Janice Landendorf's detailed bibliographical work, which lists no less than seventy-five entries under the heading 'Causes of the Mutiny—Contemporary', almost all of them published during 1857-58. Indeed the significance and centrality of the causes narrative suggested by this classification itself renders it a semi-genre, arranged alongside conventionally identified genres such as diaries and novels. A large number of these seventy-five entries are either missionary

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2 I will refer to this key study through the course of this chapter. However in my application of this early piece of the Subaltern Studies project, I will build on subsequent variations and critiques as they developed within the Subaltern Studies collective. For an overview of these shifts, see Gyan Prakash's "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism." Prakash charts the reasons for the shift from the 'subalternist search for a humanist subject-agent'-- 'the positivistic retrieval of subalterns' to 'greater attention to developing the emergence of subalternity as a discursive effect' (1480-82). In particular I draw from Dipesh Chakravarty's *Provincialising Europe* and its revisionist redefining of the constitution of the 'subaltern': 'Subaltern pasts . . . do not belong exclusively to socially subordinate or subaltern groups, nor to minority identities alone. Elite and dominant groups can also have subaltern pasts to the extent that they participate in life-worlds subordinated by the "major" narratives of the dominant institutions' (101).

accounts and sermons or military narratives, with the former regularly identifying the cause of the revolt as insufficient propagation of Christianity, and the solution as more of the same. A minor number of narratives (only three) listed by Ladendorf, are purportedly produced by 'natives'. However they are all mediated (and in one case translated) by British officers, with at least one also concealing the identity of the author<sup>3</sup>. The only 'native' narrative that appears to have been produced and published without extra-authorial intervention, and acknowledges the identity of the writer is *Asbab Baghavat-e-Hind, The Causes of the Indian Revolt* (1859) by Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898).<sup>4</sup>

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3 These entries are as follows:

- a) *A few words relative to the late mutiny of the Bengal Army and rebellion in Bengal Presidency*. By Shaikh Hidayat Ali, Subahdaar and Sirdar Bahadoor, Bengal Seikh Battalion, commanded by Captain R. Rattray, who has translated this paper from the original Oordoo. Calcutta: Privately printed, 1858. 20p.
- b) *The thoughts of a native of Northern India on the Rebellion, its causes and remedies*. With a preface by Macleod Wylie. London: W.H. Dalton, 1858. 37 p.
- c) *The mutinies, the government and the people*. By a Hindu. Calcutta, 1858. 196p.

4 This text was preceded by another full length account by Syed Ahmad Khan published in 1858, *Sarkashi-e-zila-e Bijnor (History of the Bijnor Rebellion)*. This however is a distinctly different kind of text, mostly setting out Syed Ahmad Khan's experience of and participation in containing the violence of the revolt in Bijnor, where he was at the time Sadr Amin (a sub-judge). Most of the pamphlet, that is six out of seven chapters seems to be setting out the bureaucratic details of experience of the rebellion for those, like Syed Ahmad Khan, who were interested in preventing violence and preserving life and order under the auspices of the British administration. However, it appears a discursively diffuse book in comparison with the pointed and clear quality of *Asbab*. The final chapter leaves aside the bureaucratic content and is addressed to 'Hindustanis' and 'inhabitants of District Bijnor' urging them to cooperate with British rule as it was an improvement on previous regimes: 'Not even one hundred-thousandth part of the ease was present then, which fell to your lot in English times. Look how Hindus and Muslims are living with all ease and in peace under English rule. The strong cannot tyrannize the weak now. Each worships God and his Creator according to the requirements of his religion. There is an atmosphere of live and let live. The Hindu builds temples in which to worship; the Muslim builds mosques where prayers are read and the call to prayer is uttered. There is no one to stop them, and no one to forbid. The merchant pursues his trading affairs, entrusting goods worth thousands to an infirm and aged agent, who is sent thousands of miles to earn a profit; and there is no fear of dacoit or thug. And roads -- how perfectly secure they are; women, adorned with jewellery worth thousands of rupees may ride at night in horse-drawn carriages from stage to stage, all quite free of anxiety. The owner-cultivator is busy in the fields; no one takes an iota more than the appointed rent for these fields.' With *Asbab* the following year a radically qualified picture of this idyll was to emerge.

### Syed Ahmad Khan's *Asbab*: An Overview

Syed Ahmad Khan begins *The Causes of the Indian Revolt* by a reflection on the temptation of silence, and even the wish of amnesia regarding the events of 1857: 'Since I began this essay on the causes of the Rebellion in Hindustan, I have been tempted to keep silence on the events of the past, and even to wish my remembrance of them should be blotted out'. He asks rhetorically: 'why enter further into the matter when the cause of all dissatisfaction has been discovered and provided against'? Articulation is then explained through the validating locus of 'loyalty': 'loyal men . . . should explain with all fidelity their views on the origins of this rebellion', and on the basis of its being the only native account:

That many well informed, able and experienced men have written on the causes of the disturbance, I know; but I am not aware that any native of the country has been among their number. I venture therefore, publicly to express my opinion.

(*Causes* 1)

After advancing a definition of rebellion in the introductory section, Syed Ahmad Khan then proposes his 'causes' under five heads: 'Ignorance on the part of the people: by which I mean misapprehension of the intentions of Government'; 'The passing of such laws and regulations as jarred with the established customs and practice of Hindustan, and the introduction of such as were in themselves objectionable'; 'Ignorance on the part of the Government of the condition of the people; of their modes of thought and life; and of the grievances through which their hearts were becoming estranged'; 'The neglect on the part of our rulers of such points as were essential to the good Government of Hindustan'; and, 'The bad management, and

disaffection of the army'. Under these broad headings Syed Ahmad Khan then proceeds to a detailed critique of the English government.

The first 'cause' deals with anxiety surrounding Christian evangelical activity and the nature of changes in education policy. Syed Ahmad Khan points to the government's indirect support to proselytisation, with political conquest and policies creating economic and intellectual impoverishment offering implicit incentives for people to 'abjure their faith'. He notes increased 'talk on the subject of religion' and the tacit and informal support of missionary activity by civil and military officers (17-18). Further he identifies this as 'a new system of preaching', a public and aggressive evangelicalism involving direct attacks on other creeds: 'in Hindustan these things have always been done very differently' (18-19). In the sphere of education the English schools were a problem: the common people viewed them as established for missionary purposes, while the well-informed disapproved of the removal of the classical languages of Hindustan. Higher education similarly neglected Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit, over-promoted Urdu and English, and according to Syed Ahmad Khan depended on insufficiently knowledgeable teachers (19-20). He concludes this section by saying: 'It is wrong and impolitic on the part of a Government to interfere in anyway with the faith of its subjects' (23).

Under the second head ('The passing of such laws and regulations as jarred with the established customs and practice of Hindustan, and the introduction of such as were in themselves objectionable') Syed Ahmad Khan addresses unwelcome legal measures, as well as systemic problems in the administration of justice. He suggests that Act 21 of 1850, the Caste Disabilities Removal Act, abolishing laws affecting the inheritance rights of persons converting to another religion or caste was thought to

implicitly support converts to Christianity in particular, for Hinduism did not allow of converts and Islam did not allow inheritance from 'men of another creed' (24). The Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act of 1856 was also an 'annoyance': 'there is, I grant much controversy on this point, and there always has been, but it is none the less a fact that the Hindus, who cling particularly to their forms and customs were greatly annoyed by this Act' (25). He refers to the resumption of revenue-free lands, and the sale of zamindari rights in disregard of social and organisational traditions. He details over two pages the unfairness and damaging effects of the revenue settlement system introduced with assessments fixed without regard to contingencies such as inflated price tables or the necessity for periodically leaving the land fallow. This, he argues, led to forced cultivation, weakening of the land, and a spiral of suffering and impoverishment for landlords and cultivators:

Land was not properly cultivated. The property became scanty. The cultivators were obliged to borrow money to pay the revenue. The interest on these loans ran up. Landlords, formerly men of substance, found themselves suddenly ruined. Villages, in which there happened to be land lying uncultivated, became more than ever neglected. Mr. Thomason, in Paragraph 64 of his directions to Settlement officers says that the Settlements under Regulation 9 of 1833 were light on good villages, but pressed heavily on poorer ones.

(*Causes* 30)

Towards the end of the section he deplores the introduction of stamp paper (it was 'unwise to levy a tax upon papers intended to aid in the furtherance of justice'), the 'incomplete and summary modes of investigation which prevail in the Punjab Civil Courts', 'the wrongheadedness of the judges presiding in them', and the overall delay



and cost of the judicial process (24-31).

Syed Ahmad Khan starts the third item ('The ignorance of government of the state of the country and their subjects') by deploring that there was no real communication between the rulers and the ruled, 'no living together or near one another', a circumstance reinforced by the fact that the English did not as a rule 'settle for good amongst the natives of India' (33). He moves to the peoples' lack of voice in government, preventing them from improving their conditions. The hierarchy of colonial bureaucracy, the subordinate officials' ignorance, pride and ill-treatment of native gentlemen closed any possibility of conveying their concerns. He then touches on the scarcity of opportunities of official employment under British rule and that it had hit upper class Muslims, the conventional service gentry, hardest. Small artisans had also suffered as they were faced with British machine made goods and the withdrawal of custom and patronage previously provided by native courts, and the cloth weavers had been completely ruined. Syed Ahmad Khan then criticises the investment of capital in Government loan, and concludes this section with the following general reflection on British rule:

I do not condemn it entirely. The feeling of security which the subject enjoys under British rule, of ease and of freedom, the many good roads, the putting down of dacoitee, thuggee and highway robbery; the facilities afforded to travellers, the ease with which merchants could transport their goods to far off localities, the benefit to all, rich and poor alike, which accrued from the extension of the cheap postal system, the decrease of murders and deadly affrays, the protection of the poor from the oppression of the rich, these and many other blessings have never been enjoyed under any former Government,

and in all probability never will. But it must be borne in mind that the benefits derived from the above do not efface the feeling that I have above portrayed.

(*Causes* 37)

Proceeding to the fourth item ('Neglect in matters which should have received consideration from Government') Syed Ahmad Khan begins with the statement that he would 'shew what duties the government ought to have fulfilled and which it did not fulfill'. He points to the lack of friendship towards the governed, a desideratum not just between private individuals, but between a government and its subjects, as 'affect[ing] a nation' (38). He speaks of the English holding aloof and isolated from the Indians, and the segregation of races:

Government has hitherto kept itself as isolated from the people of India as if it had been the fire and they the dry grass, as if it thought that were the two to be brought in contact, the latter would be burnt up. It and its people were like two different sorts of stone, one white and the other black, which stones too were being daily more and more widely separated.

(*Causes* 40)

He then refers to harsh and abusive behaviour of many English officials towards native subordinates. Speaking of the exclusion of natives from high appointments, he comments that while examinations were not a bad practice, they should not be a *sine qua non*, and asks that if privilege of birth provided a basis for appointments in England, why should the practice be rejected in India: 'Are the best English statesmen invariably those who have passed high examination? Are high diplomatic posts not often given to them on account of their birth and practical common sense and sometimes even without the latter qualification?' (45).

Syed Ahmad Khan proceeds to describe the effect of the sudden withdrawal of conventional munificence towards 'faithful servants, victorious generals, learned men, *faqees*, poets, beggars or . . . the deserving poor', without adequate provision of alternative means for realising the ideal of self-reliance: 'If a man be thus treated he will either rob, murder, or rebel'. In this context he argues that most of the rebels were in their own view, inculpable in following a convention of tendering allegiance to the reigning powers (the leaders of the revolt, who had established a potentially permanent government during the rebellion), or taking up service under that new order, a perfectly acceptable practice in Hindustan. In this section he also refers to the unreasonableness of English anger and vengeance, leading the rulers to lose sight of 'the true causes' of the rebellion (46-47). The 'fourth cause', concentrated on the lack of fellow feeling and fair opportunity, and post-revolt vengeance, repeatedly invokes the Sermon on the Mount and the Psalms as exhortations to humane and merciful behaviour.

Under the fifth head, 'The insubordinate state of the Indian forces', Syed Ahmad Khan refers to the practice of putting Hindu and Muslim soldiers in common regiments as having fostered a feeling of friendship and brotherhood among them, so that they thought and acted as one body. He then details the various stages of sepoy disaffection; the impact of the disbanding of the regiment at Barrackpore, and the subsequent punishment meted to the Meerut sepoys for refusing to similarly bite the cartridges serving as provocation to the mutineers:

The anger, which the news of this punishment created in the minds of the Sepoys was intense. The prisoners on seeing their hands and feet manacled,

looked at their medals and wept. They remembered their services and thought how they had been recompensed, and their pride, which I have before said was the feeling of the whole army, caused them to feel the degradation all the more keenly. . . . This rage and grief led to the fearful events of the 10<sup>th</sup> of May which events are unparalleled in the annals of history. (*Causes* 52)

According to Syed Ahmad Khan, the sepoy had completely lost confidence in the government and were driven by desperation to rebel. This disaffection spread as sepoy in other regiments stood in solidarity with the rebel sepoy, and refused to fight against them: 'they said when with our aid the English conquer our comrades, they will then turn their attention to us'. Subsequently, the awe of the government among the people disappeared as they 'were perfectly well aware that the Government were almost entirely dependant on the Sepoy army' (53) and thus the people also became riotous.

### **Syed Ahmad Khan's *Asbab* as a 'Reason' Narrative**

In this section I will focus on certain specific implications and features of this text. To begin with, in the choice of writing this book as articulated in Syed Ahmad Khan's opening remarks, silence and amnesia are linked stances in a resisted constellation of choices, and the alternative of expression is thus implicitly allied to remembrance. Forgetfulness is not posited as a real option, but its configuration with silence suggests that silence may be a political substitute, a semblance and projection of amnesia. Further, this act of remembrance is specifically conducted under the sign of Reason, on at least two levels. Firstly, by a conscious entry and participation in the 'causes narrative', in the sense of providing 'reasons for the revolt'. Secondly, by a

broader participation in the narrative of Reason as provided by the terms of Enlightenment rationality and its employment as a means of political critique and communication. The 'causes narrative' in this context stands in a dual relation to the 'Reason' narrative': on the one hand the former is obviously a feature of the instrumental operation of the latter, an expression of methodologies of scientific enquiry to 'objectively' determine causality. On the other hand (and this is primarily what I will be concerned with here), the Reason narrative affords positions that question and challenge the 'causes of the Revolt' narrative such as it was dominantly constituted in British discourse, i.e. as a narrative of counterinsurgency.<sup>5</sup>

I will now consider how Syed Ahmad Khan's *Asbab* challenges and unsettles the constitutive assumptions of the standard 'Causes' narrative. Foremost, the classic colonialist narrative of counter-insurgency as discussed by Guha is one that substitutes the rebel as the bearer of reason, with the rebel as a function of 'causes': 'insurgency is regarded as external to the peasant's consciousness and Cause is made to stand in as a phantom surrogate for Reason, the logic of that consciousness' (Guha 3).<sup>6</sup> In his introductory remarks, Syed Ahmad Khan declares:

The primary causes of rebellion are, I fancy everywhere the same. It invariably results from the existence of a policy obnoxious to the dispositions, aims, habits, and views, of those by whom the rebellion is brought about.

(Causes 2)

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5 For a reading of remembrance as a critical and rational act see Brian O'Connor on Adorno: 'The retrieval of memory is, therefore, an act of social criticism since it involves a repudiation of false reconciliation—the alleged identity of our concepts and reality—and it exposes our attempts to overcome the past, that is, our failure to come to terms with the past in its unique and specifiable individuality' (149).

6 This distinction between 'cause' and 'reason' appears to draw from foregoing philosophical debates about the status of 'reasons' as 'causes', with their distinctive focus on the voluntariness of actions. A key essay in this regard is Donald Davidson's "Actions, Reasons, and Causes" (1963). Davidson responds to A.I. Melden's *Free Action* (1961) and its claim that causal explanations are wholly irrelevant to the understanding of human actions, by positing 'states and changes of state in persons which, because they are reasons as well as causes, make persons voluntary agents' (Davidson 700).

This passage sets the terms for the rest of the book, and unlike the classic Causes narrative, locates the subjectivity of the rebel at the centre of analysis: the words 'dispositions', 'aims', and 'views' narrate rebel action as reflective of rebel subjectivity and thought.

Secondly, in Guha's analysis, the colonialist counterinsurgency narrative identifies the causes of rebellion in localised administrative malfunctioning without questioning the larger logic and workings of the Raj itself: 'disturbances originated in a local malignance in an otherwise healthy body' (31). By contrast, *Asbab* is a pervasive and interconnected *systemic* critique, and in being that it is visibly akin to the anti-colonial narrative that Guha analyses as a counterpoint to the prose of counterinsurgency (Guha 31). This thorough and pervasive critique of *Asbab* then constitutes, I argue, a significant excess within the economy of the dominant 'causes of the rebellion' narrative, a signal overstepping of the motive of containment coded in the prose of counterinsurgency.

In fact, the localised 'cause' is doubly undercut in Syed Ahmad Khan's account. The second way in which this is effected is by defining rebellion as a general political event. Syed Ahmad Khan begins his account by focussing on the meaning of the word 'rebellion' and identifies five acts that would constitute rebellion:

1. To fight with or oppose, the servants or subjects of Government.
2. To neglect, and set at naught the Orders of Government with a view to resist its authority.
3. To aid and assist or in any way take part with those who are in open opposition to Government.
4. To shew a turbulent disposition, and such as is likely to lead to lawless riot,

and disregard of the authority of Government.

5. To swerve at heart from respect and loyalty to the Government; and in times of trouble, to withhold from it an active support. (*Causes* 2)

He then moves on to identify the causes of rebellion in generic and universal terms: 'the primary causes of *rebellion* are, I fancy, *everywhere* the same. It *invariably* results from the existence of a policy obnoxious to the dispositions, aims, habits, and views, of those by whom the rebellion is brought about' (2, emphases mine). This approaching of the 'causes' by reference to the universal has a double implication: firstly it does not allow the obfuscating comfort of particularity (what went wrong here: the particular disruption of an abstract good) that is coded into the anti-insurgency narrative, but instead works by positing a generalised theory of rebellion as a social and political event. Secondly, it inaugurates in the text the invocation of the *universal* as a keystone in its participation in the narrative of Enlightenment Reason.

Central to the employment of this narrative of universality in *Asbab* is a foregrounding of the universal human 'man'. For instance, in the discussion of Cause IV both the rebels and the rulers are evaluated with reference to this category, creating a political equivalence in discourse. Rebellion is considered normatively and is humanised by the analysis that the sudden withdrawal of accustomed social and state patronage is:

like taking the reins out of a horse's mouth, turning him loose and turning him out into the jungle to find his food for himself. What is the result? He either dies or remains a wild animal all his days giving the rein to his passions. If *a man* be thus treated he will either rob, murder or rebel.

(*Causes* 47, emphases mine)

At the same time, the excess of British vengeance is divested of the halo of justified and heroic action that it dominantly possessed in contemporary British accounts: '*Men's minds* under the influence of anger are apt to lose sight of the true causes of any event and to be warped by a desire for vengeance' (47, emphases mine); and restored to a place of universal human failing.

Yet another mode by which *Asbab* invokes the Enlightenment rationality narrative and through which it lays implicit claim to common humanity (and through that to comparable political interests), is by setting out a specific web of references as universally applicable. For instance, in arguing against the introduction of stamp paper Syed Ahmad Khan refers to similar arguments made by J.S. Mill in *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) and Henry Brougham in *Political Philosophy* (1842):

It is opposed to all sound rules of Political Economy. . . . It is easy to see that the Hindustanees, who are becoming more and more impoverished everyday, can never hope to bear up under this expense. . . . Besides the heavy expenses which this system entails, it tends greatly to hinder the actual administration of justice. Mr Mill, in his book on Political Economy and Lord Brougham in his work on Political Philosophy have expressed their disapproval of the system, and it must be remembered that all arguments urged against its practice in Europe, carry with them a tenfold force when applied to Hindustan.

(*Causes* 30)

The ideal political economy of the colony is therefore argued on the same premises as apply to the metropolis, thus in an aspirational sense rupturing the differential constitutive of colonial legal and economic systems.



While Syed Ahmad Khan invokes Mill and Brougham in the realm of secular political discourse, in religion he quotes repeatedly from the Bible. The crucial remark in Cause IV for instance, inserted between references from the Gospel according to Matthew and the Psalms is: 'All men are guilty, in His eyes, who is the only true Ruler' (49). Here the discourse of religion provides an equalising platform by transcending earthly hierarchies. In this as well, Syed Ahmad Khan appears to be in consonance with a mainstream line of western Enlightenment thought, in which reason and revelation (particularly the New Testament) were both sought to be accommodated as sources of natural law.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Asbab*: Reception by the Official Establishment**

The contemporary sense of the unique and potentially inflammatory contents of *Asbab* is suggested in the biography of Syed Ahmad Khan by Altaf Hussain Hali:

He probably began this pamphlet immediately after reaching Moradabad. After it was completed, without waiting to get it translated into English, he sent it in the original Urdu for printing to the Mofussilite Gazette press in Agra. And in 1859, five hundred copies were printed and reached him. When Sir Syed decided to send them to parliament and to the Government of India, his friends came to dissuade him. . . . Rai Shankar Das . . . was at this time a subordinate judge at Moradabad and a great friend of Sir Syed's. He strongly advised that

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7 See Uday Singh Mehta on Locke (60). For a general reflection regarding the critical role of religion in Enlightenment thought, see Norman Hampson's *The Enlightenment*: 'This perpetual connection between religion . . . and the welfare of man in society, was . . . the guarantee that human laws and institutions, whose relativity to local conditions was becoming increasingly evident, could only be justified in terms of an unwritten moral code common to all humanity. . . . It confirmed the benevolence of Providence, prescribed his duty to the citizen and ensured the harmonious concordance of individual self-interest and a universal moral order. . . . The coherence, as well as the confidence of the Enlightenment, rested on religious foundations' (106).

he burn all the copies and not put his life in danger. When Rai Shankar Das saw Sir Syed's absolute insistence and he realised that his counsel had not affected him, he fell silent with tears in his eyes. Sir Syed immediately sent a parcel of a little less than five hundred copies to England and sent one copy to the Government of India. A few copies he kept with himself.

(Hali, 73, my translation)

By 1860, *Asbab* was translated and produced before the Council for discussion, and I will now proceed to examine some of the documented official responses to this text. The first of these, reported by Hali, was the reaction of Sir Cecil Beadon (1816-1880)<sup>8</sup>. Beadon, home secretary during most of the revolt, then Foreign Secretary, diagnosed the text as rebellious, and strongly recommended that Syed Ahmad Khan be put on trial for his views:

When this book reached the Government of India and after being translated into English was presented in the Council, Lord Canning the Governor-General, and Sir Barthold Frere, a member of the Council attributed its contents to simply [Sir Syed's] being a well-wisher. But Mr. Cecil Beadon, who was at this time Foreign Secretary, gave a very long speech against it and expressed the opinion that this person had written an extremely rebellious text. He should be subjected to interrogation under the law, and should be asked for an explanation. And if he were unable to provide a suitable response, he should be severely punished.

(Hali 73, my translation)

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<sup>8</sup>Beadon served as secretary to the government of Bengal, home then foreign secretary to the government of India, member of the governor-general's council, and finally, as lieutenant-governor of Bengal. He won high appreciation for his administrative expertise and quality of judgement from three consecutive governors-general: lords Hardinge, Dalhousie and Canning. . . . During the greater part of the 1857 mutiny . . . Beadon was the home secretary. . . . Riding on the crest of a conservative reaction in the aftermath of the mutiny, Beadon preferred a 'hard line' in any settlement with 'native powers', including those which had remained loyal during the 1857 tumult' (Suranjan Das, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography).

As Beadon's recommendation was reportedly not accepted by other members of the Council, the only available near-contemporary account of this response remains that by Hali. The second official response is a detailed memorandum by Sir Richard Temple (1826-1902), distinguished in the Indian colonial administration of the time for his 'literary skills' in drafting political documents and his identity as a leading member of the evangelical 'Punjab school' of British administrators.<sup>9</sup> Appended to the 1860 translation of *Asbab*, the purpose of Temple's memorandum appears to be a summary, second-order transmission of the text. Combined with the opinions of the writer, it appears to propose a pattern of response for the colonial officials dealing with it. In what follows, my attempt will be to analyse Temple's most significant strategies of reading Syed Ahmad Khan's text, and in so doing approach it in cognisance of how mediation, reception and response by the colonial establishment played a key role in defining the contours and scope of this text.

### **Temple's Memorandum on *Asbab*: The 'Others' of the Enlightenment Narrative**

Temple's memorandum is structured as a defence of British colonial policy in India and is marked by the use of shifting and inconsistently deployed categories and concepts. Responding to Syed Ahmad Khan's charge that during the famine of 1837 numerous orphans were converted to Christianity at Secundra, Temple defends it as

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9 'Temple gained his formative experience in settlement work in the North-Western Provinces . . . . His rise was swift. James Thomason, the lieutenant-governor, whose biographer Temple became, made him joint magistrate of the extensive Allahabad district, responsible for police, revenue and settlement in a tract with over half a million people. . . . Later in 1850 he accepted the renewed offer of a post in the recently conquered Punjab from John Lawrence, who enlisted his literary skills in drafting the historic first report of the Punjab commission. Temple went on to draft the next report, and the Punjab code of civil procedure. Lord Dalhousie, the formidable governor-general, thought highly of him. Temple was made secretary in July 1854 to Lawrence as chief commissioner, and had established his reputation when ill-health and family considerations drove him home in 1856. He returned to India in 1857. . . . Temple was destined to be an outstanding representative of the 'Punjab school' of Indian administration which grew up around John Lawrence with Thomason as a seminal influence. He sympathised with the evangelicalism of his mentors' (David Steele, *Dictionary of National Biography*).

'noble charity'.<sup>10</sup> Syed Ahmad Khan's identification of this as a source of people's unease about the connection between poverty and proselytisation is condemned as the 'sentiment of . . . *evil* disposed persons' which Temple hopes general '*human nature*' to not have entertained. However, in defence of missionary preaching in public places, Temple invokes the language of *rights*: 'As to fairs . . . the Missionaries had a right to attend these as much as any other people' (6). These instances are illustrative of the memorandum as an official document functioning as a complex participant in the rhetoric of Enlightenment rationality central to colonial bureaucratic discourse, while the schisms of this discourse are revealed as follows. The employment of a universalist conception of 'general human nature', its benign aura notwithstanding, serves to naturalise the acts of government and condemn dissent as 'evil'. The glorification of proselytisation as 'noble charity' (as indeed the very invocation of the terms 'noble' and 'evil'), while seemingly at odds with the secular concepts of 'general human nature' and 'rights', points to the religious components of Enlightenment rationality and their continued dominance within frameworks of modernity.<sup>11</sup> Finally, there is the duality of the selective invocation of the progressive and democratic concept of 'rights' in support of missionary activity, while withholding its application to Indian expression of dissent, or to the Secundra orphans' rights to choice of religion.

In addition to the selective and shifting use of key Enlightenment concepts, Temple's memorandum manifests at various points patent instances of feeble reasoning. For instance, it compromises its own positivistic investments in a 'causes'

<sup>10</sup> All references to Temple's text are from this unpaginated electronic version: 17 November 2011. <<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00urdu/asbab/templereview1860.html>>

<sup>11</sup> As Uday Singh Mehta has put it: 'By the nineteenth century in Britain, liberalism had plainly worked out a *modus vivendi*, if not an alliance, with religion, in part because religion had been obliged to do the same with liberalism, and because both serviced the ends of patriotic nationalism. The alleged antagonism of principle of the British monarch being both the head of the Anglican church and the prime bearer of secular political sovereignty has after all caused no serious discomfort to either church or state since the late nineteenth century' (35).

narrative by now and then invoking what 'European readers' (a homogeneously conceptualised position) would find unacceptable in Syed Ahmad Khan's account:

He says that the system of instruction had been changed. The learned languages of Asia, the Asiatic sciences and laws, ceased to be studied, European knowledge instead was conveyed in Asiatic language. But here many European readers would say that such a course gave no just cause for dissatisfaction, if indeed such dissatisfaction existed; and that the whole passage is pervaded by an illiberal and bigoted tone.

(Temple)

Here the illogicality of looking to what 'many European readers would say', in order to determine the actuality of the 'causes' of the revolt, located positivistically speaking in the local and the Indian, is obvious. Similarly in another instance, Temple rejects Syed Ahmad Khan's opening definition of rebellion, by adopting a route of reverse reasoning: since he does not approve of the conclusion the writer reaches about the policies of the British government, he therefore finds it expedient to disagree with the first step taken towards such a conclusion:

After defining rebellion, the author goes on to say—"There is but one thing which causes rebellious intentions to arise in the mind, viz. the introduction of measures unsuited to the disposition, or to the wishes, institutions, or customs of those who rebel".

It is evident that, though such a cause may be of great importance, yet there may be other causes. *I notice this here because the author, starting with this idea, tries afterwards to show that the British government brought on the rebellion by certain measures it adopted, from which conclusion I, for one*

*dissent.*

(Temple, emphases mine)

Another strategy of dismissal evident in the memorandum is that of drawing attention away from the text and towards the 'native' identity of the producer of the text. For instance, the 1860 translation reads:

All had felt convinced that Government would not openly compel anybody to change his religion; but that just in the same manner as it had *abolished the study of Arabic and Sanskrit languages*, and *impoverished the country*, it would devise secret means for converting the people, by keeping them ignorant of their religion and its inculcations, teaching them its own religion, and disseminating religious books and tracts; at the same time holding out the *enticement of employment and preferment*. (Causes 15, emphases mine)

Temple represents this passage in the following terms:

. . . he says that the people at large believed that Government had serious designs on their religion and customs. But he says it was understood that these designs would be worked out not suddenly, nor forcibly, but gradually and by means of *instruction* and *moral suasion*.

(Temple, emphases mine)

This passage provides an instance among several of the containment and obfuscation of the clear critique in *Asbab* by a dexterous reformulation of terms: 'the abolition of the study of Arabic and Sanskrit languages' is re-inscribed as 'instruction', and 'the enticement of employment and preferment' is termed 'moral suasion'. Even

more particularly striking is Temple's proceeding comment: 'This is rather a remarkable statement as coming from a Native'. Other than the fact that Temple has credited his own ingenious paraphrase with the status of the statement of 'a native', what is 'remarkable' about this statement? Why should it be remarkable 'as coming from a Native'? These are explanations that the memo does not provide. The comment however is successful in adding a layer of deflection: the focus and attention of the readers has been diverted from the content of the passage to the person of the author; from the statement to the identity of the producer of the statement. A similar note emerges in response to Syed Ahmad Khan's critique of colonial economy:

It may seem strange that a Native of intelligence should believe that his country was becoming impoverished, while it could be shewn in a hundred ways to be increasing in wealth. But it is unfortunately a fact that as yet the Native gentry have no idea of political economy.

(Temple)

Finally, several critical aspects of the impasse the colonial establishment inhabited regarding the reception and evaluation of a 'native' account of the revolt and colonial governance are encapsulated in this elucidating passage from Temple:

As a rule it is very difficult to induce a well disposed man to tell a disagreeable truth. It is only the most experienced officers that can learn the inner sentiments of Natives; and as European officers know this, they are apt to suspect (and with truth) that in these times a Native who criticizes the conduct of Government does so with some bad motive. . . . There is every reason to believe that in Hindostan many classes used to speak, and still speak, of the

British in very unjust and malevolent terms—terms indeed of which we generally had no idea at the time, and of which even now we can have no accurate conception. (Temple)

Several significant and circular ideas are expressed here. The strong need to know the thoughts of natives is countered by the insistence on the privatisation and internalisation of such thoughts. The belief that many classes of Hindostan speak ill of the British government does not however place 'a native who criticizes the conduct of Government' (even though within a highly controlled publicness) outside the pale of 'bad motives'. Within such a bind, the 'inner sentiments of natives' can be acceptably represented only through the filter of 'the most experienced officers', and least of all by 'a Native who criticizes the conduct of Government'. Having already articulated this binding framework, it is hardly surprising that Temple concludes that Syed Ahmad Khan's statements seem to be motivated by 'rancour', 'spite' and 'enmity'. The increasing focus on the 'native' identity of the writer in assessing *Asbab* thus demonstrates that the 'causes' narrative as normatively constructed was not 'neutral' but had to function in the service of imperial interests, in relation to which Syed Ahmad Khan's narrative is found unacceptable by Temple in content as well in origin. The 'native' thus emerges as the unassimilated other of the 'universal human' of Enlightenment discourse. Concomitant to this key exclusion is the implied official insistence on the privatisation and internalisation of native thoughts on the rebellion.

Despite this strongly negative assessment of the critical content of Syed Ahmad Khan's text by both Cecil Beadon and Richard Temple, it is significant that the government did not take any action against the writer of this pamphlet. It appears to have been clear that the native writer had formally chosen to enter the narrative of



'causes of the revolt', and could do so by participating in the implicit 'code of pacification' informing the narrative of counter-insurgency. To that extent in his analysis regarding how such an uprising may be prevented in future, Syed Ahmad Khan provides a specific solution: the induction of natives in the legislative council (12).<sup>12</sup> However this proposal stands in a complex relation with the rest of the text: the strongly critical quality of *Asbab* arguably makes this proposition more akin to political pressure than simply comprador participativeness, and moreover, the specificity of the solution scarcely accounts for the extent and nature of the critique. This thorough and pervasive critique of *Asbab* thus generates an excess within the economy of the dominant 'causes of the rebellion' narrative, a signal overstepping of the motive of containment coded in the prose of counterinsurgency. This production of excess is then registered in the official reaction of suspicion and panic, exemplified by Beadon's and Temple's responses. As Adorno puts it in "The Meaning of Working Through the Past", the hegemonic investment in 'the effacement of memory', 'in accord with the desire to get on with things' ensures that 'whoever doesn't entertain idle thoughts doesn't throw wrenches into the machinery' (92).

### **Administrative Silence as Political Containment: The Construction of the 'Silent' Native**

The recommendations of Cecil Beadon and the suspicions of Richard Temple were not translated into government action; instead *Asbab* was met with an administrative silence best understood as a politic form of containment. This politic silence may be read first in the general post-revolt need to construct native loyalty. In her article "Reading 1857: the Government Report and Indigenous 'Narrative'",

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12 'The government . . . acknowledged the force of Syed Ahmad's argument about Indian representation on the Legislative Council by making its first Indian appointments to that Council in 1862, and extending the principle as the century went on, by means of the election of Indians to municipal boards, district boards, and finally provincial councils' (Francis Robinson, xiii).

Sukeshi Kamra draws attention to Lord Canning's resolution of 1857 that declared:

When the number of men guilty of what it is impossible to pardon is so great, the government will gladly seize of every opportunity of reducing the work of retribution before it, by giving a free pardon to all who show that they have a claim to mercy on this ground.

(qtd. in Kamra 137)

Kamra's article argues that in colonial administrative handling of resistance the loyal Indian subject was a practical necessity, the fulfilment of which hinged on the mutually sustained fiction (between colonial government and native testifier) of the transparency of the native's declaration, in politic denial of the fact that 'native narratives produced under conditions of threat [are] always already strategic ' (Kamra 134). In this context of politic denial, it is arguable that Cecil Beadon's and Richard Temple's anxious vocalisation on the one hand and the establishment's forbearance on the other are thus not two essentially disparate forces in the colonial reception of Syed Ahmad Khan (as they have conventionally tended to be seen).<sup>13</sup> Rather they function as two complementary strands tending towards the political containment of a challenging 'native' voice.

In the evolution of colonial historical memory in the late nineteenth century, this containment then seems to have functioned in two directions, each complementing the other. On the one hand, this strategic non-engagement and politic silence of the establishment regarding *Asbab* provides the context for the deletion of

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13 For a survey of Richard Temple's personality, role and political stand regarding land reforms in the post-revolt years that emphasises his distinction from most of the colonial establishment, see G.R.G. Hambly's "Richard Temple and the Punjab Tenancy Act of 1868." (*The English Historical Review* 79.310 [Jan 1964]: 47-66).

Syed Ahmad Khan's text in British historical memory as a 'causes' narrative.<sup>14</sup> So, for instance while giving the final touches to the official history of the revolt in 1889, George Malleon thought it *de rigueur* to include a sub-section titled 'Causes of the Mutiny', and commented:

Before I express my own opinions on the matter I think it only proper that I should state the views of some thoughtful and well-educated natives, with whom I have had the opportunity of discussing the subject. *I may premise that it is not an easy matter to obtain the real opinions of native gentlemen on matters regarding which they know. . . .* That it is their real opinion I, who enjoyed special opportunities of conversing with them without restraint, and who possessed their confidence as far as an Englishman can possess it, know most certainly. . . . *Were Indians ever to write their accounts of the causes of the mutiny*, it would astonish many in this country.

(Kaye and Malleon 281-282, emphases mine)

The 'causes' that Malleon claims to have gleaned from special access to educated natives, such as annexations and Dalhousie's Doctrine of Lapse were no revelation even in the 1850s, and had been the most standard references in subsequent inquiries and treatments. What Malleon's 'Causes' does reveal however is the repeatability of mutiny narratives as if they indeed were revelations.<sup>15</sup> It also shows that the desirable and imagined silence of Indian gentlemen had become a critical part of this mutiny

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14 The other direction in which it functions is in the consolidation of the loyalty narrative between 1860 and 1888, which I analyse in the following section.

15 This repeatability of the initial mutiny narrative is a larger issue that goes beyond the nineteenth century period discussed in this chapter, even into post-independence Indian narratives. S.B. Chaudhuri in his historiographical work *English Historical Writings on the Indian Mutiny 1857-1859* has made this assessment at some length (Chaudhuri 16-17). He remarks: 'It is strange that a subject ploughed for more than a century by hundreds of writers, continued to be studied much in the same form from the beginning to the end. There has been very few development of ideas [sic], almost all the issues which were discussed at that time in the early stages of the revolt have the same priority in modern studies too'(16).

narrative, projected as perennially in need of the interpretation and mediation of English administrators, a trope traceable through Temple and Malleeson, from 1860 to 1889. This construction of 'native silence' as I have argued earlier, in effective terms hinged crucially upon the insistence on the privateness and internalisation of native thoughts on the rebellion.<sup>16</sup>

The theme of 'silence' hence resonates in varied directions in relation to the post-revolt discourse. On the one hand appears the desirable but mythical silence of 'native gentlemen', and on the other there exists the operative silence of the colonial establishment, that can be seen as functioning as an instrumentalist strategy of authority. The silence of the colonial establishment may be viewed as a form of alliance with 'forgetting' in the Adornian sense, where forgetting is a conscious excision of the politically discomfiting by the ruling class rather than a neutral and seemingly therapeutic conjunction with 'forgiveness' ("Working through the Past" 88, 92). Also as Robert Fivush has suggested in a reconsideration of the politics of silence, silence need not always be a reflection of oppression and neither is speech a simple index of empowerment: 'This conception of silence is the freedom not to speak, to be silent, the freedom to assume shared knowledge that comes from a position of power. The need to speak, to give voice to experience, comes from a need to explain, justify, rationalise, convince, both others and oneself' (94).

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16 Faisal Devji in an article titled 'Apologetic Modernity' argues that the relation between Syed Ahmad Khan and the British establishment was not dialogical or dialectical, and with reference to the *Life of Mohammad* shows that his intended readership were Muslim youth undergoing an English education. The question of intended readerships is complex across individual texts, and certainly varies from the direct political engagement with the British in *Asbab*, in comparison to possibly some other texts. What I am proposing here is that the non-dialogical aspects of this relation may be located not in Syed Ahmad Khan's discourse, but in the nature of strategic non-engagement by the British colonial establishment.

### The Loyalty Question: Syed Ahmad Khan's *Loyal Mohammadans of India*

Even as Syed Ahmad Khan's *Asbab* was erased from historical mutiny memory as a 'causes' narrative—an erasure that validated the myth of unspeaking native gentlemen—the challenge it signalled kept erupting and resonating in colonial discourse, albeit in the recast and reframed form of what may be termed the 'loyalty question' of the 1860s onwards.

In 1860-1861, following closely upon the heels of *Asbab*, and its reception by the official establishment, Syed Ahmad Khan published a work in three parts titled *An Account of the Loyal Mohammadans of India*.<sup>17</sup> Though it was intended to be published as an ongoing bilingual journal in Urdu and English, it closed down after three issues due to lack of funds (Sirriyeh 82). Comprising a catalogic account of Muslims, especially government servants who had supported or protected the British during the rebellion, it was intended as a corrective to the en masse demonisation of Muslims as traitors and compulsive rebels, an image that Syed Ahmad Khan perceived to have been generated by the dominant contemporary public discourse. The motive of these pamphlets thus appears to be considerably more defensive as compared to the plain expression and assertiveness of *Asbab*. Each of the three parts has a list of loyal Muslims, with individual biographies, copies of certificates and testimonials from English officers, and papers relating to *jagirs*, pensions and rewards given by the government. Part 2 also contains extensive quotations from the Quran and the Hadith to demonstrate Muslim-Christian amity as a tenet of Islam, and it denounces the use of 'jihad' as a concept to understand the rebellion. Part 3 further reproduces a copy of a covenant of mutual support and protection effected between

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<sup>17</sup> Khan, Syed Ahmad. *The Loyal Mohammadans of India*. Meerut: Mofussilite Press, 1860.

Muhammad and the Christians to demonstrate a tradition of peaceable cooperation.

At the same time, however, *Loyal Mohammadans of India* arguably retains a contestatory and interventionist quality. This is particularly with reference to Syed Ahmad Khan's perception of the glaring biases of contemporary British mutiny discourse. For instance:

I am an attentive reader of the newspapers, and I have also read the various works that have been written upon the mutiny and rebellion, and in all do I find the most bitter denunciations against the Mohammadans, who are freely represented as being everything that is vile, treacherous, and contemptible.

(LMI 3)

I must deprecate that wholesale denunciation against the entire class of Mohamamdans in which the Newspapers are wont to indulge, and which stains the pages of those who have written upon the events of 1857.

(LMI 6)

The loyalty and good services of Mohammadans are rarely alluded to in the newspapers, while the writers on the Mutiny seem to have ignored them altogether.

(LMI 5)

It is most astonishing and scarcely credible, that well bred and learned gentlemen, belonging to a nation renowned for their high administrative talents and scientific skill, should openly and unscrupulously, both in their speech and writings, brand with the foul infamy of treason, an entire class of people

because they are Mohammadans.

(LMI 39)

It is idle and wicked to connect the revolt with the principles of our religion,  
for how can religion foster cruelty, tumult and disorder? (LMI 40)

Syed Ahmad Khan's choice of the 'loyalty' narrative after that of the 'causes' narrative, I want to argue, may thus indicate an alternative location to the mainstream 'causes' narrative to which he was not welcomed as a participant. In comparison to *Asbab*, where the speaking voice is confidently impersonal (even as it voices Indian concerns), *The Loyal Mohammadans of India* shows a discomfited awareness of his own subject position and identity, suggesting a realisation that occupying the very subject position of a native entrant into writings on the mutiny rendered his discourse questionable in the dominant perception:

I cannot deny that I am a native of Hindustan and a Mohammadan, and that I am writing in praise of my countrymen and co-religionists; and if any person arguing on these premises, should choose to accuse unjustly of being a biased witness, he is at perfect liberty to do so. (LMI 9)

The bind of 'loyalty' and the compulsory silence attendant upon 'nativeness' seem to lead once again to a foregrounding by Syed Ahmad Khan of the universalising categories of European enlightenment thought and procedure, where he lays claim to an impersonal rationality:

. . . but I feel persuaded that all *rational men* and friends of *justice* will acknowledge that, in recording the *facts* herein collected, I have in no

instance been blinded by prejudice, or shown a wilful disregard of the claims of strict impartiality, since my statements will invariably be found to be supported by unimpeachable *documentary evidence*.

(LMI 9, emphases mine)

At its core thus, this text brings to prominence a defining tension binding Indian colonial modernity: between enlightenment rationality and its proffered horizon of democratic discourse among equals and empirically demonstrable facts on the one hand, and the feudal-emotive, hierarchical and personalised demand for loyal subjects on the other hand.

### **The Loyalty Question: W.W. Hunter's *Indian Musalmans* and Syed Ahmad Khan's *Review***

Within a decade of the writing of *Loyal Mohammadans of India*, a landmark in the development of the loyalty debates was the publication of a sensational tract in 1871 by W.W. Hunter (1840-1900)—*The Indian Musalmans: Are They Bound in Conscience to Rebel against the Queen?* The tract was the culmination of several newspaper articles Hunter had written on the topic in the 1860s, but the motive force and genesis of Hunter's *Indian Musalmans* has been the source of some puzzlement and inadequate explanations among historians. There is a strong suggestion that it was that none other than Lord Mayo, the Viceroy who requested Hunter to write the book on 30 May 1871, a task Hunter efficiently completed within a period of three weeks. The link between official policy on Indian Muslims and the writing of Hunter's book has been a matter of debate, as it appears to have gestated in the grey area of unofficial suggestion and official support, without any formal sponsorship from the government.



This character of the book was immediately seized upon by the contemporary British press, with the *Spectator* on 19 August 1871 describing it as 'demi-official'.<sup>18</sup>

Sir William Wilson Hunter was one of the most prominent civil servants of post-revolt India and served there for a quarter of the century (1862-1887). Initially an assistant magistrate, he went on to become the first Director General of Statistics, with the work of organising the Statistical Survey of India occupying him from 1869 to 1881. He was an additional member of the Executive Council (1881-87), President of a Commission on Education (from 1882 onwards), gave evidence on Indian railways (1884), was Member of a Commission on finance (1886), vice-chancellor of the University of Calcutta (1886) and a prolific writer of books.<sup>19</sup> As a writer of histories who was simultaneously deeply invested in the administrative success of empire, he figures in Guha's article as an archetypal instance of the producers of the prose of counter-insurgency.<sup>20</sup> Ranajit Guha's detailed analysis of the stereotypical tropes and images that mark Hunter's rhetorical construction of the Santal rebellion suggests his account of the Santal rebellion was a forerunner of the strategies of the prose of counter-insurgency in his later, more explicitly 'administrative' work, *The Indian Musalmans*.

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18 See Ali, "Hunter's 'Indian Musalmans': A Re-Examination of Its Background". Also, Peter Hardy in his *Muslims of British India* (1972) : 'Hunter was almost certainly acting as a receiving set for transmissions of an official policy in gestation while he was writing, for on page 204 of his book he writes 'the government has awakened to the necessity of really educating the Musalmans and Mayo had already as will be seen, adduced somewhat similar arguments in his note of June 26 1871, that is three days before Hunter completed his manuscript' (88).

19 See J.S. Cotton, 'Hunter, Sir William Wilson (1840-1900)' in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

20 Guha examines at length the double location that frames even the seemingly scholarly work of Hunter, *The Annals of Rural Bengal* (1868), explicitly addressed to both 'scholars' and 'statesmen'. Focussing on a chapter on the Santal tribe rebellion of Bengal in 1855, Guha studies this seemingly 'modern exercise in historiography', with its substantial arsenal of ethnography (two-thirds of the chapter) as geared towards primordialising the Santals. This facilitates the civilising narrative of 'reclaiming children of the forest' and its inherent conjunction with the instrumentalist motive of turning this tribal peasantry into cheap labour for characteristically colonial projects such as railways and plantations in India, as well as indentured labour for Mauritius and the Caribbean (Guha 20-27).

The opening paragraphs of Hunter's 165-page long text declare that 'the whole Muhammadan community has been openly deliberating on their obligation to rebel'. In relation to newspaper discussions in the 1860s about whether British India should be considered 'Dar-ul-Islam' or 'Dar-ul-harb', in which Hunter was an active participant, he produces a dramatic construction of 30 million people belonging to a single denomination as compulsively and coherently engaged in rebellious schemes, *on religious grounds*. What was a matter of largely theoretical contention (whether British India was 'Dar-ul-Islam' or 'Dar-ul-harb' for Muslims) becomes with Hunter a settled conviction that acceptance of British rule was against Islamic precepts, and further that this translated into imminent and perpetual threat from the entire community. Some of the descriptive terms that appear in Hunter's text include 'a persistently belligerent class' ('Dedication'), 'a source of permanent danger' ('Dedication'), 'Rebel Colony', 'fanatic swarms', 'hostile settlement', 'network of conspiracy' (1), 'a source of chronic danger' and 'the seditious masses in the heart of our Empire' (27). David Lelyveld has analysed some of the dramatic stereotyping as well as the glaring fault lines and internal contradictions in Hunter's evocation of Indian Muslims, pointing out how Hunter's picture builds on chronological, geographical, and ethnographic collapsing and confusion. Thus an account that begins with a sensational view of the Pathan 'Rebel Camp on our frontier' slips through tenuous connection into the Muslims of Eastern Bengal. Further on these rebellious Muslims, 'the illiterate and fanatical peasantry of Muhammadan Bengal' (as opposed to the more easy-going upper classes), at will morph into an aggrieved Muslim aristocracy (Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation* 10-11).

In this construction of pan-subcontinental 'Muslim' threat, Hunter evokes Wahabism, the puritan, uncompromising and rigid strand of Islam, as a common

thread. In a crucial bind that informs Hunter's text, however, it is precisely his valorisation of such an uncompromising interpretation of Islamic obligation that leads him to answer the question posed in his title in an assertive affirmative: yes, the text claims with understanding, the Indian Musalmans *are* in conscience bound to rebel against the Queen. In this projection of Islam as inherently intolerant Hunter, as a 'sympathetic expert' on Indian Muslims, then proceeds to judge and evaluate them by the yardstick of the absolute demands of their religious doctrine as he understands it. What follows is a curious volte face, particularly in the second half of the book, leading to two significant consequences. Firstly, the Wahabis, who according to Hunter constitute the prime source of the threat of sedition and rebellion in India, are resuscitated as 'noble traitors':

Certain it is that the Wahabi missionary furnishes, so far as my experience goes, the most spiritual and least selfish type of the sect. (IM 50)

The Wahabi of the nobler sort knows no fear for himself, and no pity for others. His path in life is clear, and neither warnings nor punishments can turn him to the right hand or the left. There is at present in one of the Bengali jails a venerable white-haired Musalman, of blameless life in all respects, with the exception of his being a bitterly persistent traitor. (IM 80)

Secondly, such florid passages exoticising and celebrating the Wahabi seditionist find a corollary in Hunter's strong unease with the many contemporary fatwas and interpretations denying that Indian Muslims were under any religious obligation to wage war against the Queen. Having pre-established a narrow and

absolute version of Islamic requisites, Hunter views all other interpretative and responsive possibilities with suspicion and at length accuses them (sect by sect, and instance by instance) of involving 'casuistry' and 'lawyer-like acumen' (80-88).<sup>21</sup> Using what appear to be the twin items of faith for Hunter, that is 'the intolerant spirit of Islam' and 'a really sincere disciple' (106), *The Indian Musalmans* constructs an essentialised Islam of Hunter's desires, with reference to which an 'unrebellious Muslim' is rendered an ontological impossibility: such persons are in Hunter's judgement either prevaricating subjects of the Empire or poor Muslims, if not both simultaneously. Hence, Hunter concludes:

An honest government may more safely trust to a cold acquiescence, firmly grounded upon a sense of religious duty, than to a louder-mouthed loyalty, springing only from the unstable promptings of self-interest. (IM 107)

The following points, then, emerge from an overall analysis of this fascinating book. In the first instance, Hunter appears to be as much in search of a puritan and essentialised Islam as the Wahabis whom he posits as the prime enemies of the Empire, and is himself (by his own account) more pious and rigid in his understanding of the 'Law of Islam' than most Indian Muslims. In relation to this, any other position signifies for him a worldliness or interpretative flexibility that constitutes a situation of political anxiety, since it signals the presence of a realm of secular political interests and potential threat from that context. Most crucially, a romanticised political disengagement located in an intolerant vision of Islam (the uncompromising but disinterested Wahabi) is explicitly favoured over political engagement and dialogue (and potential dissent) from a secularised space of reasoning and

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<sup>21</sup>See more generally, Chapter III, "The decisions of the Muhammadan Law Doctors".

interpretation. Finally, while the account begins with an exciting picture of recalcitrant and violent Pathan tribes, it culminates with the sombre articulation of the locus of threat being the mainland political elite, people already in the public realm, 'the best of people' in Hunter's words, who 'are not on our side' (106), the proclaimed 'loyal' subjects of the British crown. As against this, the binding doctrinal schema that Hunter produces, i.e., all Indian Muslims are under the absolute religious imperative to rebel, serves a double purpose. It constructs the unified and overarching object 'The Indian Musalmans' for Hunter's prose of counter-insurgency, and forecloses any interpretative, rational, middle ground as compromised and unreliable thus discursively pre-empting challenges that may arise from within the codes of secular political engagement.

In the year following the publication of this tract, 1872, Syed Ahmad Khan published a detailed critique of Hunter's book, *Review on Dr. Hunter's Indian Musalmans: Are they Bound in Conscience to Rebel against the Queen?*. This 53-page text with eight appendices is a spirited engagement with Hunter's book. Exposing at length the various inconsistencies, gross generalisations, and a plethora of errors of commission and omission, it declares that while Hunter's text was a work of 'extreme literary skill', it was 'mischievous and of small value as an historical work' (5). In contrast to Hunter's sensational images, florid prose and highly coloured rhetoric, Syed Ahmad Khan produces a response that with clarity of argument and the straightforward idiom that marked *Asbab* attends to a wide range of texts spread over several centuries and gives a historicised account of Wahabism and of the resistance on the frontier. Syed Ahmad Khan's text, in obvious methodological and discursive contrast to Hunter's is marked by historical precision and attention to chronological, geographical and political context. The *Review* fully references its sources— Indian,

British and others— and pays close attention to texts and translations.

As a reasoned refutation, it lists numerous points where ignorance, partial information and mistranslation were pressed into the service of Hunter's questionable project. The most ready charge that Hunter attracts is that of internal inconsistency and a shifting and illogical train of connections: Syed Ahmad Khan even quotes from a recent newspaper article by Hunter himself where he seemed to have arrived at conclusions contrary to the ones voiced in this book. In brief, the major points Syed Ahmad Khan makes are: a) that the tenets of Wahabism have been oversimplified and projected inaccurately by Hunter in a necessary doctrinal association with rebellion; b) that the actual historical presence of Wahabism has always been a fringe one in Islam, and in India, Wahabis, historically rejected by the mainstream of Indian Muslim life (and disallowed even from preaching in Mughal India), had found freer scope and support only under British rule, and further they were encouraged as a political force of conquest against Sikhs in the early nineteenth century by the British; c) that the Pathan tribes were turbulent and often violent, but their violence had been historically directed towards all mainland rulers irrespective of the rulers' religion, and that while their resistance to the British had some valid political and territorial reasons it could not be called a religious war; there had been a similar ongoing resistance after 1857 from the frontier, but it emanated from mutiny fugitives both Hindu and Muslim, and thus could not logically be termed a 'jihad'; d) that an intermediate and interpretative position needed to be understood regarding Islam in India, rather than the simplistic oppositional binary of *Dar- ul- harb/ Dar- ul- Islam* that Hunter rigidly insisted on: since and so long as the religious freedom of Muslims was protected under British rule, India could not be a *Dar- ul- harb* (land of the enemy), and there was no *religious* obligation whatsoever to 'rebel against the queen'. In sum, Syed Ahmad

Khan views Hunter's dark and undue fascination with Wahabism and the mandatory association of all Indian Muslims with rebellion as a 'grave political error', further compounded by the fact that the book was written by 'an official high in office and in favour with Government' (6).

### **The Loyalty Narrative : Colonial and Post-colonial Minoritisation**

The preceding account of the post-revolt political narratives by Syed Ahmad Khan encompassing the early foray into the 'causes' narrative and its unacceptability given the anti-insurgency conventions of the latter, its substitution by the 'loyalty' narrative and the contentious nature and evolution of the latter, is suggestive of the complex and often highly rational and contestatory spaces occupied by Syed Ahmad Khan in relation to the post-revolt British establishment. This inherently contestatory inhabiting of the 'loyalty' narrative acquires particular significance with reference to two sets of developments, which I will now consider.

Firstly, the consolidation of the image of Syed Ahmad Khan's loyalism in the 1880s finds a deceptively simple logical reflection in the knighthood bestowed on him in 1888. G.F.I. Graham, one of the translators of the first version of *Asbab* published in English in 1873 and also the first biographer of Syed Ahmad Khan, remarks in a chapter devoted to this text in his 1885 biography:

Although some of us may not agree with Syed Ahmed's 'Causes of the Revolt', the pamphlet is exceedingly valuable, as giving us an insight into native modes of thought, and as written by the ablest of our loyal Mohammadan gentlemen. . . . The following extracts may prove interesting to those of my

readers who have not yet read the pamphlet.

(Graham 33)

Graham's interventions (as translator and biographer) in some measure suggest the continuance of the idea of necessary mediation and filtering by an English officer to ensure acceptability for the native voice. Equally, these comments register the status of the text as disagreeable to many and its having remained largely unread, prompting Graham to reproduce within his narrative, twelve years after the translation was published, twenty-five pages of extracts from *Causes*. This attempt at creating acceptability, even engagement, needed to be proposed in terms of Syed Ahmad Khan's being 'the ablest of our loyal Mohammadan gentlemen'. That these attempts to bring around British opinion were taking place close to three decades after the writing of *Asbab* and a mere three years before he was awarded the CSI, confirm the loyalty narrative as being inherently and protractedly complicated and tense, facets significantly sought to be ironed out by Graham's simple and somewhat domesticated portrayal (seen in the use of the possessive pronoun '*our* loyal Mohammadan'<sup>22</sup>) of Syed Ahmad Khan as a British loyalist.

Secondly, the long-term historical consolidation of Syed Ahmad Khan as the 'other' of Indian nationalism, has involved a forgetting of both his critical resistance to imperial strategies and systems, as well as the common investment of nineteenth century 'nationalists' and reformers in lobbying the government through an implicit faith in the judicial qualities and equalising power of enlightenment procedure and reasoning. Relevant to this context, Aamir Mufti in his *Enlightenment in the Colony*

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22 Analysing paternalism in the British liberal tradition, Uday Singh Mehta has described it as 'an odd mixture of maturity, familial concern, and an underlying awareness of the capacity to direct, and if need be, coerce.' He writes: 'One gets a sense of these varied sentiments in the frequently used expressions "our Indian subjects," "our Empire", "our dependants"'. The possessive pronoun simultaneously conveys familiarity and distance, warmth and sternness, responsibility and raw power' (11).



points to the problematic of Syed Ahmad Khan having been admired by the nationalist tradition (as seen through Nehru) for his espousal of “modern” colonial education’ and his opposition to pan-Islamism, but derided for his loyalism to the British, while all these facets were historically ‘indissolubly linked’ (135). Mufti argues that the post-colonial nation-state has replicated and perpetuated the complex attitude of the colonial state towards Syed Ahmad Khan. This attitude, Mufti argues is locatable in the context of ‘a constitutive tension in the emergence of the forms of liberal culture and society’ (Mufti 39) linked with Enlightenment universalism, and historically reflected first in the creation of the question of Jewish assimilation in national societies in Europe, and then in Muslim minoritisation within colonial-national modernity in India. This national minoritisation— with particular reference to Syed Ahmad Khan— has also been perceptively treated by David Lelyveld. Lelyveld points out that in supporting British rule Syed Ahmad Khan ‘was hardly unique in the nineteenth century’, that ‘the founders of the Indian National Congress were equally enthusiastic in their support of the British empire and their wish to be part of it’<sup>23</sup>, and counterposes this with the post-colonial ‘set[ting] up of Syed Ahmad Khan against the Nehrus as the embodiment of anti-national feeling, the Muslim ‘other’ that helps define the boundaries of the Indian nation’.<sup>24</sup>

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23 Regarding this also see Anil Seal’s general remark regarding Indian politicians in the 1870s: ‘Although Indian politicians were looking further afield, they remained deeply deferential, concerned far more to canvass their requests in the metropolis than to stir up support for demands in India. When they did attempt to rouse opinion in India, it was chiefly to enhance their credibility in London’ (253).

24 Lelyveld, David. “The Mystery Mansion: Swaraj Bhavan and the Myths of Patriotic Nationalism”. *The Little Magazine* 4.4. (2003). 15 Nov. 2011.  
<http://www.littlemag.com/ghosts/davidlelyveld.html>>. All references to this article are from this electronic version. The article is a nuanced and closely researched account of the history of the Anand Bhavan by Lelyveld, For a significant instance of a post-colonial history of Indian nationalism that replicates and reflects a teleological and metanarrativist approach towards the formation and fortunes of the Indian National Congress, treating as secondary and extraneous elements that did not fall directly into the narrative (such as Syed Ahmad Khan) is Anil Seal’s *Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition* (1968): ‘In this book the chief task has been to study the emergence of national political organisation in India. This has led me to concentrate upon Indians educated in the western mode; for the same reason the stress has fallen upon the political experiments taking place within the vicerealties of Lytton, Ripon and Dufferin. This simplification of the totality of Indian politics is deliberate. It omits for the time being much discussion of the

Even as the year 1888 was to provide the culminating seal of approval to Syed Ahmad Khan's loyalty in the shape of a knighthood, the turn of political heat had also led A.O. Hume to describe the Congress that very year as a 'safety valve' (cited in Seal 269) for British rule at its session in Allahabad. Also in this year of frantic and hectic political activity, at a distance of close to thirty years from the rebellion, the Urdu writer, Nazir Ahmad (1836-1912) was to publish his 'mutiny novel' *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* (*Son of the Moment*).<sup>25</sup>

### **Nazir Ahmad's *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* (*The Son of the Moment*): Reflections of Syed Ahmad Khan's *Asbab***

The eponymous protagonist of this novel *Ibn-ul-Vaqt*, closely modelled on Syed Ahmad Khan (and perhaps partly on Nazir Ahmad himself), is in his youth an

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confused stirrings of the more traditional types of politics, and says little about the political scene in northern and central India. . . .these themes will be raised and placed in their historical context from the point in time when they became important weights in the Indian political balance' ('Preface', xiii).

25 For a useful biographical summary of Nazir Ahmad, see Christina Oesterheld: 'Nazir Ahmad was born into a family of *maulvis* in Bijnor. His education was traditional and he received it from his father and other *maulvis* in his native city and in Delhi, where he also studied at the famous Delhi College for eight years. He started his career as a teacher of Arabic and subsequently became a Deputy Inspector of Schools in the Department of Public Administration. There he also translated the Indian Penal Code into Urdu and rose to the rank of Deputy-Collector in the North-West Provinces. In the later he served in high positions in Hyderabad. After his retirement from administrative service he devoted the rest of his life to writing and teaching. Although one of the most committed followers of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, he was nonetheless critical of certain aspects of the latter's teachings, and even more critical of the blind imitation of the West he discerned in some of his countrymen, mainly as a consequence of their western education. His addresses to the Muhammadan Educational Conference drew large audiences because of his fine oratorical powers, which surpassed those of his fellow-educators and even those of Sir Syed. Nazir Ahmad propagated ideals of education and reform in his writings and speeches with a missionary zeal. All his tales were the outcome of this commitment and were shaped accordingly' ('Nazir Ahmad and the Early Urdu Novel: Some Observations', 28). See also Mushirul Hasan's foreword to the 2003 translation: 'In 1869, he received the largest prize of Rs 1,000 in the government instituted vernacular competition for his novel, *The Bride's Mirror*, and in the following years his novels and translations continued to carry off the best prizes. He received the titles of Khan Bahadur and Shamsul Ulema, and was awarded the LL.D by the University of Edinburgh. Nazir Ahmad wrote extensively, including seven "novels" or "tales", books and theological treatises. In the words of Ralph Russell, he has "an astounding range of vocabulary and a sureness of touch which enables him to write effortlessly and appropriately on every theme, and which makes one feel that he is never at a loss for suitable words." His style, comments Ali Jawad Zaidi, historian of Urdu literature, is colloquial despite the intrusion of uncommon words and phrases from the classical languages' (Hasan, Foreword. *Son of the Moment* xv).

enthusiastic and adept initiate into Western learning. During the revolt, he rescues an English officer and conceals him in his house for three months, but with the restoration of British authority Ibn-ul-Vaqt and his family need the protection of Noble Sahib's influence from the vengeance of the victorious British forces on Delhi. In addition to getting this protection and rewards for saving his life, Ibn-ul-Vaqt is urged by Noble Sahib to embark on reform of his community and rapprochement of the Muslims with the British. The Englishman expresses his concern for the 'depressed', 'ruined' and unreformed state of the Muslims and at length persuades the hesitant Ibn-ul-Vaqt to take on this role.

To become the reformer he is meant to be, Ibn-ul-Vaqt has to undergo a metamorphosis requiring commensality, western dress, physical relocation outside of the conventional city, living in an English style bungalow and maintaining the paraphernalia of an Anglo-Indian lifestyle. While issues of lifestyle and inter-dining appear to earn him alienation and disagreement from his community, this 're-forming' of the reformer provides him the space to address the British establishment.

Thus at the heart of this novel there appears a twenty-five page long after-dinner speech on the causes of the revolt, delivered to an audience of Englishmen invited to Noble Sahib's house to be introduced to Ibn-ul-Vaqt. The unexpectedness of a speech from Ibn-ul-Vaqt is mentioned at the outset: 'As soon as Noble Sahib took his seat, Ibn-ul-Vaqt stood up. No one, not even Noble Sahib, expected that he would also speak' (77). This speech constitutes an entire chapter of the novel (chapter 11) and is closely modelled on Syed Ahmad Khan's *Asbab*. On most counts it echoes and expands upon the same points that Syed Ahmad Khan had made in 1858: the violence of British rule, the rude and antagonistic behaviour of its representatives ('the power

of the sword can conquer the bodies of the subjects but not their souls', 79); the 'change of world' (81) for Indians rendering their links, skills and talents useless and out of employment; the inadequate transition into modernity and modern governance under British rule; the suspected threat to religion by British activities; the open proselytisation and subtle manipulation through education, and lack of regard to Indian religious sanctities and spaces; the lack of contact of government officials with Indians ('the state or conditions of the subjects is not known to the Government (87) ; the growing poverty of the Indians: the ruin of landholders and cultivators due to British land revenue policies, and of artists and craftsmen due to the 'machines of Europe' (93). In at least one instance, Nazir Ahmad also incorporates the issue that emerged in Syed Ahmad Khan's later writings when he emphasizes that though Muslims don't have supremacy under English rule, they have religious freedom, and their religion provides for peaceful living under such a condition.

In its over-all tenor as well as in the particular articulation of some ideas, Nazir Ahmad's text/Ibn-ul-Vaqt's speech is even more forceful and outspoken than Syed Ahmad Khan's *Asbab*. Regarding the favoured modality of the 'causes' narrative and the inadequateness of dominant British public discourse within this framework Ibn-ul-Vaqt remarks:

It is the way of the world that efforts are made to find out the causes of an event only after it has taken place. But blessed are those who find out the causes well before the results manifestly show themselves. . . . The press has started discussions on it and every one says whatever he thinks. But if the Government . . . acts upon what the press says, and this is what the press wishes it to do, then with my apologies to the Government and to you, let me say that it will remain the same ignorant and uninformed Government as it was

before the Mutiny.

(*Son of the Moment* 78)

Further, he emphasises that the chief beneficiary in the India-Britain relationship is Britain:

While the Indians have received manifold advantages from the peace and freedom of the English rule, which as a matter of fact were absent earlier, it cannot be denied that England too has become all the more rich for it. It is due to her rule over India that she has taken an edge over other European countries. . . . The rule over India has increased the trade of England a thousand times over and it is anybody's guess how much more it will increase. . . . That is why the English should ponder more over the causes of the Mutiny.

(*Son of the Moment* 79)

Ibn-ul-Vaqt even goes so far as to say that the British did not merit any support from Indians during the revolt:

After the Mutiny, the English complained that the Indians had not supported them. But they should also look within themselves and ask what obligations were performed or kindly treatment given to expect any support. They won't be able to establish a single reason.

(*Son of the Moment* 80)

Ibn-ul-Vaqt's speech has three especially significant components. The first is its ironically distanced and critical treatment of the dominant 'causes narrative', even as it participates in it in a critical interventionist mode. The second is that Ibn-ul-Vaqt, arguing at length that 'on the whole there were enough reasons for mutiny and revolt' (86), appears as the bearer of reasons/Reason, rather than the mute function of 'causes'

that native subjectivity is reduced to in the prose of counterinsurgency. The third is the overarching and systemic critique presented in Ibn-ul-Vaqt's speech, confronting 'the Raj as a system and in its entirety' (Guha 31), and thus showing a marked similarity to the anti-colonial narratives that Guha analyses as a counterpoint to the prose of counterinsurgency. In all these respects Ibn-ul-Vaqt's speech replays the salient facets of Syed Ahmad Khan *Asbab*.

Further, a particular feature of Ibn-ul-Vaqt's speech is the demystification of 'loyalty' by the complete absence of this referent in his discourse. At the very beginning of his speech he declares:

I picked Noble Sahib from the heap of dead bodies and kept him in my house. But if I hadn't done that I would not have been a Muslim, nay, not even a *human being*. I performed my religious, *rather human duty*, and do not think I deserve any praise for it. (78, emphases mine)

In this foregrounding of the universal 'human being' Ibn-ul-Vaqt's speech, like Syed Ahmad Khan's text, lays implicit claim to the equalising categories of enlightenment thought, thus setting the stage for the critique that follows.

Significantly, attention to the sections of the text framing Ibn-ul-Vaqt's long speech on the causes of the revolt reveals a striking and dramatic reflection of the reception of Syed Ahmad Khan's *Asbab*. The initial remark that, 'No one, not even Noble Sahib, expected that he would also speak' (77) can be seen as reflective of the sense of the overstepping of bounds and roles by Syed Ahmad Khan by the sheer act of articulation within the 'causes' discourse, indexed as the general and collective response in the British establishment, including even sympathetic officials. Even more

interestingly at the end of this twenty-five page long speech, the auditors seem to magically disappear from the text: the chapter ends at the close of Ibn-ul-Vaqt's speech, and no response or reaction from the purported listeners is narrated. The next chapter then begins with fresh action, and significantly enough is titled 'Ibn-ul-Vaqt faces opposition'.

The speech, in a sense the culmination of Ibn-ul-Vaqt's bid at entering mutiny discourse as an equal, also marks the beginning of the end of his positive relations with the British establishment. The silent 'response' of the establishment to Ibn-ul-Vaqt's speech is suggestively reflective of the disapproval and politic silence that together met Syed Ahmad Khan's *Asbab*. This dramatic fragment at the centre of Nazir Ahmad's text, an 'incomplete' narrative sequence as it were, presents a significant documentation of response interpretable as the politic silence of the British establishment resisting engagement with its 'disloyal' subjects.

In the chapters that follow, Ibn-ul-Vaqt's assimilation into English society is rendered precarious by racial and cultural separatism, and his adoption of English ways is viewed as a threat to colonial difference and hierarchy. Noble Sahib departs, and with the less-than-noble aspect of the English establishment in the ascendant, Ibn-ul-Vaqt is asked to leave the cantonment during a cholera epidemic, on the grounds that he is a 'native' his protestations that he follows the English way of life of no avail (chapter 17). As David Arnold has pointed out, 'in an environment in which epidemiology and empire repeatedly intersected, cholera was a highly political disease' (*Colonising the Body* 159): the appearance in the novel of this grid of modern, scientific discourse of disease and medicine thus effectively plays out the subservience of the Enlightenment narrative of progress to the instrumental interests

of empire.

Ibn-ul-Vaqt's rejection from English society finds a counterpoint in an antithetical presence and discourse: that of late nineteenth century puritanical Islam, represented by a character Hujjat-ul-Islam (literally 'Argument for Islam'), a relative of Ibn-ul-Vaqt's. Hujjat-ul-Islam views western lifestyle as unviable and incompatible with Islamic and traditional ways: as a visitor to Ibn-ul-Vaqt's bungalow, he remains unaccommodated in as well as unaccommodating to the forms of colonial modernity signified by Ibn-ul-Vaqt's new habitation. Unable to offer his prayers, and troubled by thoughts of purity regarding the preparation of food, he declines to spend the night at Ibn-ul-Vaqt's house. As the novel proceeds he occupies an increasingly central role, especially as Ibn-ul-Vaqt falls into disfavour with the government, and interestingly it is he who is able to get the ear of officials antagonistic to Ibn-ul-Vaqt and manifests a key public presence. At the same time, Hujjat-ul-Islam advises Ibn-ul-Vaqt to remove himself from the fraught public spaces of post-revolt political negotiation, and instead posits a homogeneous, essential Islam as a refuge from questions of colonial politics. Significantly, in this he appears to closely reflect the 'noble' Wahabi— or at any rate the religiously over defined, and politically withdrawn Muslim subject of W.W. Hunter's desires— discussed earlier in the chapter.

Inward looking and rejecting of spaces and practices that arise from within the codes of secular political engagement, Hujjat-ul-Islam particularly dominates the last two chapters ('On Religion' and 'On Politics and Religion') where he engages Ibn-ul-Vaqt in debate and opposes his ideas and activities. An illustrative passage is as follows:

[Hujjat ul Islam:] 'But lo and behold, one revolt has just been subdued and you



have already started to talk about a second one!'

'Excellent, one charge has not yet been proved, and you lay another charge against me!' said Ibn-ul-Vaqt. You think that even the demand for our rights is revolt. Thank God, you are not the head of the Investigation Department like me.'

'Has a vanquished nation any rights?'

'Why not? It's another thing if an uncivilised and cruel government does not accept them, but the British Government is civilised and just. That is why every demand is made on it.'

*(Son of the Moment 229)*

While Ibn-ul-Vaqt remains sceptical and unconvinced by the increasingly vocal zeal of Hujjat-ul-Islam, more and more speech space is taken up by the latter and the final speech in the novel belongs to him. Interestingly, from the expansive speaking space that he occupies in chapter 11 in critical engagement with the British establishment, Ibn-ul-Vaqt is by the end of the novel— pushed and rejected by English imperial anxieties on the one hand, and pulled and repudiated by post-revolt puritanical Islam on the other— confined to a losing and limited dialogue with Hujjat-ul-Islam.<sup>26</sup> Hujjat-ul-Islam in the novel becomes both an embodiment and disseminator of the need to privatise and internalise native thoughts on the revolt, thus reinforcing the colonial establishment's project of constructing the 'silent native'.

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<sup>26</sup> Hujjat-ul-Islam, interestingly, is not present in India at the time of the revolt, but is away in Mecca: his post-revolt presence, particularly dominating the last third of the novel, seems to be suggestive of a transhistorical, undamaged essentialised Muslim consciousness, seeking to guide the socially and psychically damaged Ibn-ul-Vaqt. As Barbara Metcalf points out, the Ahl-i-Hadis discouraged the institutional forms of sufism, which they understood to be a danger to true religion (274), and it is significant that the only form of spiritual guidance that Ibn-ul-Vaqt seeks (during the revolt) is that of a Sufi saint, who refuses to support the idea of jihad against the English. However, the evolving world of the novel seems to be dominated by the rigidity of puritanical Islam, as other modes and loci are effaced in its discursive landscape.

## Literary and Historical Metanarratives and *Ibn-ul-Vaqt*, Nazir Ahmad's Forgotten Novel

As Ibn-ul-Vaqt's charged speech about the causes of the revolt is received with the politic silence of non-response by the British establishment, similarly a 'silence' of colonial reception appears to have surrounded *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* as a novel in comparison to Nazir Ahmad's other works. In the context of the formation of colonial Urdu literary history, the 1860s had seen the extremely influential announcement of an award by the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western provinces, Sir William Muir, 'for the production of *useful* works in the vernacular of *approved design and shape*', stressing that '*books suitable for the women of India will be especially acceptable*' (Naim 292-293, emphases mine). Significantly, two of Nazir Ahmad's first three novels, published between 1869 and 1874, won this prize, and emerged as influential instances of early Urdu prose. The first, the award winning *Mirat-ul-Urus* ('The Bride's Mirror'), revolving around the antithetical characters of two sisters, was a tale attempting to inculcate the arts of domesticity and family management. Published in 1869, within twenty years it was reprinted in editions totalling over a 100,000 copies, and was also translated into Bengali, Braj, Kashmiri, Punjabi and Gujarati. It has never been out of print in Urdu, and was translated into English and published in London by G.E. Ward in 1903.<sup>27</sup> The next novel *Binat-ul-Nash* ('Daughters of the Bier') published in 1872, continued the theme of instructing women. The third, *Taubat-ul-Nasuh*, which won Nazir Ahmad the prize again, was an inspired reworking of Daniel Defoe's *The Family Instructor*, and was focussed on restoring piety in the family, particularly in its young members. This too has never been out of print since, and Matthew Kempson, the Director of Public Education at that time, approved of it

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<sup>27</sup> See Pritchett, Frances. Afterword. *The Bride's Mirror*. By Nazir Ahmad. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001.

so much as to translate and publish it in English in 1884. Not only were both *Mirat-ul-Urus* and *Taubat-ul-Nasuh* made part of school syllabi (Naim 301), the latter was soon prescribed as a textbook for English civil servants on probation<sup>28</sup>.

However Nazir Ahmad's 1888 'mutiny' novel *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* differed from the prize winning ones preceding it most notably in the fact that it definitively steered clear of referring to sharif women subjects and the private arena of the feminine and the family—the standard favoured sites for the negotiation of late nineteenth century colonial modernity and its pedagogical concerns. In an unusual discursive gesture, this novel resists the sublimation and deflection of colonial conflict onto women's spaces. This is a battle fought entirely on the person and intellect of the male protagonist, with the narrative playing out key political conflicts in the public realm through dialogue and interaction between various male characters, Indian and British.

Yet it is significant that neither the immense contemporary popularity of 'mutiny writings' in England,<sup>29</sup> nor the apparently continuing English concern to 'obtain the real opinions of native gentlemen on matters regarding which they know' (Malleeson, quoted above, 1889), the stature that Nazir Ahmad had himself acquired under British rule (as a recognised literary figure and a member of the revenue services), even the explicitly public and political nature of the book which could have qualified it as more relevant reading for trainee officers resulted in any notice taken by the colonial establishment of this novel by Nazir Ahmad. Instead the choices of recognition, canonisation, and translation veered definitively towards the domestic,

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28 See "Preface" by Matthew Kempson to 1886 edition, London: W.H. Allen and Co.

29 See Gautam Chakravarty: 'Measured against British writing on India from the late eighteenth century to decolonisation and after, the seventy-odd novels on the rebellion from 1857 to the present day show how more than any other event in the British career in India the rebellion was the single favourite subject for metropolitan and Anglo-Indian novelists'(3-4). The decade immediately following the publication of *Ibn-ul-Vaqt*, the 1890s, saw no less than nineteen English mutiny novels.

enclosed, and 'apolitical' worlds of the other novels, thus constructing in literary history a resonance, through a politic 'silence' of response, of the desirable and mythical silence of the native gentleman on matters connected with the rebellion. *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* ultimately got translated into English as late as 2003, exactly a century after *Mirat-ul-Urus*, and about 120 years after *Taubat-ul-Nasuh*.

It is also significant that 1888, inscribed in historical memory as a year of dramatic and diametrically opposed divergence between Syed Ahmad Khan (and by extension Indian Muslims' corporate political choices) and the Indian National Congress, was the year of the publication of *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* as well, the effaced and 'forgotten' Urdu narrative of the revolt, and a complex political resume of the post-revolt decades. A reading of Anil Seal's *Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, a major post-colonial history of Indian nationalism, for instance, shows an overarching meta-narrativist approach towards the events of the late 1880s. 1888 in particular emerges as the definitive year of divergence: 'by the end of 1888 the breach was clear' (Seal 337). In Seal's teleologically conceived grand narrative of Indian nationalism, the nationally predicated Congress<sup>30</sup> and its definitive 'other', Syed Ahmad Khan, appear as if they were self-assured actors certain of their assigned roles in the tableau of historical events. However *Ibn-ul-Vaqt*, published the same year, is revelatory of the internal doubts, intellectual self-questioning and plurality and fluidity of positions among the seemingly corporatised Indian Muslims. Significantly the novel foregrounds a vocabulary of reasoned and critical political engagement with British rule rather than the idiom of loyalty/disloyalty, and resists retreating into the

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30 See for instance Seal's statement describing his project and historiographical method: 'What matters is the trend towards national political organisation, and not the minutiae which accompanied it. To linger over the details of the formation of Congress would be to bring the history of the national movement to the level of a detective story. . . . Many of the riddles dissolve when the genesis of the Congress is examined in a more historical way, and put back into the framework of trial and error out of which the modern party was slowly to emerge' (276-277). The teleological and unilinear narrative is evident in several such formulations in the book.

'apolitical' positions of puritan religiosity or domestic concerns.

### **The Creation of Minor Narratives and Disruptive Forms of Remembering**

The effacement of *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* from the late nineteenth century literary landscape, then, constitutes a second-order creation of native silence on the revolt, reinforcing the first phenomenon at the time of the reception of Syed Ahmad Khan's *Asbab* thirty years earlier. In the intervening years, narratives centring on the 'loyal Muhammadan', the 'disloyal Muhammadan', women's education, domesticity and private reform are favoured and consolidated, rubrics which the ideologically complex, polemically engaged, and directly political narrative of *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* resists. As such, this is reflective of the construction of amenable political narratives in the interests of the late nineteenth century colonial polity, the implications of which resound into post-colonial history writing.

Moreover, reflecting in fictional mutiny writing the same silence that attended Syed Ahmad Khan's text in official British histories of 'Causes', the effective excision of *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* as a novel of significance can be said to have contributed to the construction of a plainly hegemonic *literary* archive, with the result that even postcolonial literary critics who have attempted to deconstruct and expose the ideological formations attendant upon English mutiny novels have been constitutively constrained in their analysis by the nature and limitations of their material. For instance, Gautam Chakravarty's admirable work, *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination* (2005), by default appears to image Syed Ahmad Khan as a reconstituted loyalist, an image interestingly gathered from a mutiny novel of 1904, *With Sword and Pen* by H.C. Irwin. Not only does Chakravarty's reading telescope 1858, the

1880s and 1904 (and even 1947), he is also constrained to conform to a dominant reading of Syed Ahmad Khan,<sup>31</sup> a conclusion coded within the recognised archive of mutiny fiction.

In this context Aamir Mufti's argument in *Enlightenment in the Colony* about colonial-national modernity and the minoritisation of narratives and memory is relevant to understanding the network of texts examined in this chapter. Mufti posits minoritisation as a process inherent to the nationalisation of peoples and cultural practices, as the national formation is historically predicated on the internally riven assumptions, the 'constitutive tensions' of Enlightenment culture. He argues that the moments of arrival of the European nation-state and of colonial Indian modernity were accompanied, even defined, by the minoritisation of in the first instance European Jews, and in the second, of Indian Muslims. Thus the historical creation of the 'Jewish Question' and the 'Muslim Problem' necessitates academic attention to the 'process of minoritisation, and the pressures exerted on language, literature, culture and identity in the process of becoming minoritised' (Mufti 12). The domain of these pressures include 'linguistic and cultural practices, and . . . narratives and memories of collective life' (13). 'Minority' in this context thus emerges as the critical site where the questionable stability of distinction between history and memory comes into focus, opening the possibility of 'recover[ing] minority as a place of disruption of that distinction and to *affiliate critical practice itself to these disruptive forms of remembering*' (13 *emphases mine*).

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31 'Usman's decision to be a 'loyal subject' of the British empire, and his new-found faith that the British government was "the best government going" for Indian Muslims suggests the end of any compact that may have been forged between Hindus and Muslims during the rebellion, and the beginning of an identity politics that led eventually to Muslim separatism and the Partition. Irwin's representation of the reformed, 'loyalist' Muslim is not unlike Sir Syed's attempt to exonerate Muslims in the *Causes*, and to urge the community to integrate with the new dispensation; for as he observed in the early 1880s: "If the Muslims do not take to the system of education introduced by the British, they will not only remain a backward community, but will sink lower and lower until there will be no hope of recovery for them"' (Chakravarty, 125).

The above discussion of Nazir Ahmad's *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* and its 'forgotten'/minor status in literary history has thus attempted to approach this text as 'a disruptive form of remembering'. *Ibn-ul-Vaqt*, I have suggested, is disruptive of the singular colonial-national narrative, as well as of the approved and authorised later nineteenth century narratives of minority: narratives of loyalty/ disloyalty, domesticity and education, even as Syed Ahmad Khan's *Asbab* was disruptive of the coded assumptions of the dominant counterinsurgency 'causes' narrative in 1859.

## Conclusion

This chapter has built upon some key Adornian ideas regarding reason, remembrance, and history. In his essay 'Reason and Revelation', Adorno proposes the unreason of rationality as lying in its instrumentalist concordance with power:

The excess of rationality, about which the educated class especially complains, and which it registers in concepts like mechanisation, atomization, indeed even de-individualization, is a lack of rationality, namely, the increase of all apparatuses and means of quantifiable domination at the cost of the goal, the rational organisation of mankind, which is left abandoned to the unreason of mere constellations of power, an unreason that consciousness, dulled by constantly having to consider the existing positive relations and conditions, no longer dares rise to engage at all.

(*Critical Models* 138)

I have read the dominant 'causes of the revolt' narrative as being in its counterinsurgency motive an instance of the 'apparatuses and means of quantifiable domination' and hence eventually of 'a lack of rationality'. Against this I have posited the 'causes' text by Syed Ahmad Khan in its lack of containment within this motive, its critique of 'constellations of power', indeed in its very locus of production as a distinctly more thorough and energetic inhabiting of the possibilities of Enlightenment rationality. In a related idea, 'forgetting' is a rationally and politically suspect notion, allied especially as it often is with silence— either real or imagined, of the 'silenced' or as an instrumental strategy of authority.

In its study of the processes of minoritisation of 'Indian Musalmans' and of strands of discursive and literary history that did not fit neatly into authorised narratives, I have drawn from Aamir Mufti, and also more broadly from Adorno's reflections on the tasks for theory:

It is in the nature of the defeated to appear, in their impotence, irrelevant, eccentric, derisory. What transcends the ruling society is not only the potentiality it develops but also all that which did not fit properly into the laws of historical movement. Theory must needs deal with cross-grained, unassimilated material, which as such admittedly has from the start an anachronistic quality, but is not wholly obsolete since it has outwitted the historical dynamic.

(*Mimima Moralia* No. 98, 151)

In this light, the chapter has touched upon the issue of dominant historical narratives and their placing of Syed Ahmad Khan, predicated on establishing a singular meta-narrative of Indian nationalism. In more detail, it has, through Nazir Ahmad's *Ibn-ul-*



*Vaqt*, explored the question of the historical formation of colonial literary canons, and the political dynamic of texts 'that fell by the wayside'.<sup>32</sup>

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32 Adorno, *Mimima Moralia* No. 98, 150.

## CHAPTER THREE: REMEMBERING AS RECOVERY

### Introduction

This chapter explores the disjunctures, continuities and variations in the discourse about 1857 in what may broadly be termed the high nationalist phase of the colonial and post-colonial Indian polity. It studies a selection of texts spanning the half-century beginning 1909 until 1959, including V.D. Savarkar's *Indian War of Independence 1857* (1909), M.K. Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* (1909), *An Autobiography* (1927-29) and other incidental writings, Jawaharlal Nehru's *An Autobiography* (1936) and *The Discovery of India* (1946), Amritlal Nagar's Hindi reportage *Gadar ke Phool* (Ashes of the Revolt, 1957) and Qurratulain Hyder's Urdu novel *Aag ka Darya* (River of Fire, 1959). The texts by Savarkar, Gandhi and Nehru constitute an identifiably political corpus of writings, and are pre-independence reflections on questions of political method and vision that, I argue, configure the rebellion of 1857 in distinct yet dialogic ways. Qurratulain Hyder's novel has been chosen as a contrapuntal reflection on Nehru's writings on the nation: focusing on the six chapters in *Aag ka Darya* that depict the disruption signified by the revolt, I suggest that certain unresolved questions about tradition and enlightenment modernity in the Nehru narratives are spotlighted in Hyder's text, an Urdu novel written in the troubled interstices of post-Partition identities. The reading of Amritlal Nagar's book is meant to provide a view into the signification of 1857 in post-independence discourse partaking in particular of the commemorative and collative motives. As a work by a well known Hindi writer written in the centenary year, it is also offered as a sample of the inadequate fulfilment of promises regarding the recovery of the folk and of an alternative narrative of the

rebellion. If on the one hand the trope of 'recovery'—psychic, narrative and political—brings these texts together in this chapter, on the other hand my close reading of these is informed by the Benjaminian conception of the possibility of memory as strongly imbricated with literary form and by the Adornian insistence on the political valence of remembering and forgetting.

### **Savarkar's *Indian War of Independence 1857*: The Rhetoric of Revenge**

In 1906, when the twenty-four year old Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966) arrived in London as a prospective law student, his profile as a young radical was already in the making. A leader of the organisation Abhinav Bharat in India, he had come to England on a scholarship provided by Shyamaji Krishnavarma. Shyamaji Krishnavarma had set up India House as a lodging house for Indian students, then started the journal *Indian Sociologist* in 1905, and began to offer scholarships for young Indians to study in Britain as long as the recipients guaranteed that they would not take up government jobs when they returned to India (Sumita Mukherjee 97). While a lodger at India House, Savarkar soon became a core figure in what was to be increasingly identified as a centre of Indian revolutionary terrorism in England. Distinguished primarily for his persuasive oratorical skills and magnetic personality, he was widely understood to have been instrumental in inspiring Madan Lal Dhingra, a fellow student lodger at India House, to carry out the assassination of Sir Curzon Wylie in July 1909.<sup>1</sup>

The year following his arrival in London—1907, was the fiftieth anniversary of the rebellion. This was significant in giving a particular expression to the

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<sup>1</sup> India House was described as 'the most dangerous organisation outside India' in a 1910 publication *Indian Unrest* by Valentine Chirol (148).

revolutionary inclinations of Savarkar, and probably to the writing of his best known work, *The Indian War of Independence*. His biographer Dhananjay Keer has written:

In Britain May First was observed as a thanksgiving day in honour of the British victory over the Indian revolutionaries of 1857. Newspapers like Daily Telegraph proclaimed in headlines: "Fifty years ago this week. An Empire saved by Deeds of Heroism." In addition, now a drama was staged in London in 1907 in which Rani Laxmi and Nanasahib were depicted as ruffians and murderers. To counteract the vilifying propaganda carried on through the English play Savarkar decided to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of the heroes of 1857. On the 10<sup>th</sup> May 1907, Indians in Britain held meetings, observed fasts, took vows, and paid their grateful homage to those great martyrs of 1857 and displayed on their chests memorial badges with pride. In trains and in streets scuffles ensued between impudent Britishers and the patriotic Indian youths. . . . Harnam Singh and R.M. Khan, who wore such badges, quitted their college protesting against the Principal's words of insult about the heroes of 1857.

(Keer 35)

The following year in May, the *Times* noted that nearly 100 Indian students attended a meeting at India House to commemorate the anniversary of the Mutiny, and was particularly concerned that students were coming down to London from Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh to attend.<sup>2</sup> The genesis of the *Indian War of Independence* appears to have occurred alongside, as the book was originally written in Marathi in 1908 and 'some select chapters used to be reproduced in English, in speeches which Veer Savarkarji used to deliver at the open weekly meetings of the Free India Society

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2 *The Times* 23 May 1908 (cited in Sumita Mukherjee 97).

in London' (G.M. Joshi xi). This background establishes the matrix of commemoration and counter-commemoration in the fiftieth and the fifty-first anniversary years of the rebellion as being vital to the conceptualisation and writing of Savarkar's magnum opus. Further, it indicates the proximity of Savarkar's response to the events and terms of British commemoration, crystallised in the wresting of 'mutiny' narratives of heroism from the British to the Indian side, which I shall now consider.

In analysing the nature of Savarkar's text as constituting an inaugural moment in the Indian nationalist appropriation of 1857, it is important to note the centrality in this text of a simple inversion of values as a mode of remembering the revolt.<sup>3</sup> The first sentence in Savarkar's introduction to the book introduces the effect of temporal distance and suggests the implication of historical perspective:

Fifty years have passed by, the circumstances having changed, and the prominent actors on both sides being no more, the account of the War of 1857 has crossed the limits of current politics and can be relegated to the realms of history. (IWI xxiii)

However, this implication is not pursued in the rest of Savarkar's two page introduction: historical distance does not lead to claims of objectivity, but rather provides opportunity for an instrumentalist appropriation of the past:

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3 This may be read as the inauguration too of the repeatability of the mutiny narrative in Indian historiography that S.B. Chaudhuri laments in his historiographical survey (*English Historical Writings* 16). Ranajit Guha has identified this inversion with continuity as a defining feature of radical histories of colonial insurgencies: 'This literature is distinguished by its effort to break away from the code of counter-insurgency. It adopts the insurgent's point of view and regards, with him as 'fine' what the other side calls 'terrible' and vice-versa. It leaves the readers in no doubt that it wants the rebels and not their enemies to win . . . Yet, these two types . . . have much else in common between them' (Guha 28).

The nation that has no consciousness of its past has no future. Equally true it is that a nation must develop its capacity not only of claiming a past but also of knowing how to *use* it for the furtherance of its future. The nation ought to be the *master* and not the *slave* of its own history.

(IWI xxiii, emphases mine)

History, in these framing paragraphs of *Indian War of Independence*, is posited as a site of the potential inversion of power relations, in which the binary terms of reference remain constant to the power relation sought to be overturned, that of master/slave. Thus, critically, models of domination are ratified and consolidated in the act of choice and inversion.<sup>4</sup> The process of inversion as informing Savarkar's text hence involves a strong degree of proximity to imperial narratives and representations of the rebellion, manifest at multiple levels.

At the level of the formal conceptualisation of the book, *Indian War of Independence* is a reflection of British mutiny histories in several ways. Approximately 550 pages long, its epic length bears testimony to the dominant Victorian mutiny history volume as a formal model. Like many English histories, the narrative is structured around the double organisational model of (a) providing a gallery of heroes, with (b) an intersecting progressive narrative of events charted through shifting locations. The book is divided into four parts, titled 'The Volcano',

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4 In the first chapter ('Swadharma and Swaraj'), in which Savarkar sets out his vision of the task he has embarked on, the instrumental centrality of the mode of inversion is further elaborated: to write a full history of a revolution means necessarily tracing all the events of that revolution back to 'their motive, the innermost desire of those who brought it about. This is the telescope which will show clearly the lights and shadows obscured by the blurred presentation of partial and prejudiced historians. When a beginning is made in this manner, order appears in the chaos of inconsistent facts, crooked lines become straight, and straight lines become crooked, light appears where darkness is, and darkness spreads over light, what appeared ugly becomes fair and what looked beautiful is seen to be deformed'(4).

'The Eruption', 'The Conflagration' and 'Temporary Pacification'. Seven out of its thirty chapters focus especially on personalities of the revolt and are titled: 'Nana Sahib', 'Shahid Mangal Pandey', 'Tatia Tope', 'Kumar Singh and Amar Singh', 'Moulvie Ahmad Shah' and 'Ranee Lakshmi Bai'. Another fourteen are organised around locations intersecting with a progressive description of events, with titles such as 'Delhi', 'The Fight in Delhi' and 'Delhi Falls', and with other major locations also forming part of the narrative schema, such as 'Meerut', 'Rohilkhand', 'Cawnpore and Jhansi' and 'Oudh'. In the Indian seizing of the comprehensive imperial epic of the mutiny, Savarkar occupies the place of a pioneer. Finally, Savarkar's introduction is followed by a 'list of important books consulted', thirty-six out of the forty being standard nineteenth century British mutiny histories and other narratives, which he had apparently consulted in the British Library. Only four are Indian sources (three Marathi and one Bengali), but interestingly, these are never referenced in the text, while the English histories are often marshalled, either as unwitting witnesses for the Indian side of the story, or as examples of prejudiced history writing.

At its most encompassing ideological and political level, *Indian War of Independence* displays Savarkar's normalisation of forms of violent western nationalism, his 'deep-rooted complicity with the modular forms of European republicanism, and the European idea of nation state' (Gautam Chakravarty 18). His valorisation of Mazzini, and celebratory references to revolution in Italy are among the more obvious declarations of this alignment. Another prominent form in which the internalised logic of western nationalism appears in the text is the justification of massacres of English women and children during the rebellion with reference to ethnic massacres in Europe: upholding the massacre of the Moors by the Spaniards, and of the Turks by the Greeks, Savarkar declares that wherever national wars are

proclaimed, national wrongs are avenged by national killing alone (275). The text asserts a conscious internalisation and inverse adoption of the imperial defence of violence:

As regards the massacre of these brave people [the mass execution of the rebellious sepoys] in a manner which would generally bring shame upon even savages, English historians generally say that, though this was undoubtedly cruel, “the severity of the hour would be the humanity of all time!”. The cruelty was desired in the interests of humanity! English historians, remember this your own sentence, “The severity of the hour would be the humanity of all time!”. As you now know the meaning of this sentence, you will also remember it exactly on a future occasion. It is well that you perpetrate this cruelty for the sake of humanity, but do not forget that the Hindu Nana is there at Cawnpore! (IWI 150)

In Savarkar's text, the ideological investment in revolutionary violence is supported by the glorification of all acts of bloodshed by the rebels, expressed through an unrestrained invocation of violence and an extreme celebration of gore and vengeance. For instance Savarkar's sarcastic critique of expansionist pieties while commenting on Dalhousie's annexation of Burma gives way to images of blood and gore, involving a play on the colour red symbolising British control, and the red colour of blood and revenge:

Send a 'peace' mission to Burma and the work is done. This peace mission so tightly embraced the peace of Burma that its ribs were broken and it expired! This very loving task was soon over and Burma was also annexed. Now, at



last, the whole of Hindusthan—from the Himalayas to Rameshwar and from the Sindhu to the Iravady became red—but oh! Dalhousie, do you not fear it will be redder still? (IWI 17-18)

Also, describing the massacre of the British at Kanpur, Savarkar writes:

Soon all the boats caught fire, and men and women and children all jumped hastily into the Ganges. Some began to swim, some were drowned, some were burnt and most succumbed to bullets sooner or later! Lumps of flesh, broken heads, severed hair, chopped off arms and legs, and a stream of blood! The whole Ganges became red! As soon as anyone took up his head above water, he was shot by a bullet ; if he kept it under water, he would die of asphyxia! Such was the wrath of Har Dev! Such was the one hundredth anniversary of Plassey! (IWI 235)

Passages such as these abound in the text, conveying an impression of excited pleasure in the graphic description of extreme and spectacular violence.

In several of these passages the rebel thirst for blood is displaced onto the geography of the nation, particularly its rivers and water bodies. Of the well at Cawnpore, he writes:

Men drank water so long from the well, but the well now drank human blood. As the English had thrown to the skies the screams of brown women and children at Fatehpur, so, the Pandays threw the screams and corpses of white women and children into the deep down! The account between the two races

extending over a hundred years, was thus being settled! Even the Bay of Bengal might, in ages, be filled up; but the yawning well of Cawnpore—never!

(IWI 308)

And, in the chapter on Delhi he writes:

Horses began to gallop on the bridge of boats leading to Delhi. But did the river Jumna understand their secret mission? It was necessary to let her know this and get her blessings before marching on. Then, *catch hold of that Englishman there walking along the bridge, and let his blood be poured into the dark Jumna!* This blood will tell her the reason why these Sepoys are galloping so hurriedly towards Delhi!

(IWI 118, emphases mine)

Some of the outstanding rhetorical strategies Savarkar employs include a liberal use of exclamation marks, direct addresses to the reader, use of the present tense and a frequent rhetorical combination of narrative reporting with imperative command. As in the previously quoted paragraph, this strategy is employed in the following one as well, where the voice of the historian-narrator merges with the voice of the demagogue or instigator of armed revolution:

Yes; now comes the time of the rising. Artillery! Rise in revolt! Infantry! Take burning torches in one hand and shining swords in the other and dance about in all directions, roaring like lions. See the colour of every man you meet in the street; if he is dark, embrace him; if white, kill him.

(IWI 263)

Finally, Savarkar's narrative of 1857 not only hinges on the seizing and inversion of British mutiny narratives, it also participates in a dominant association between remembering and vengeance entrenched in the official discourse on 1857. The straightforward invocation of memory in the service of resentment and revenge is thus the driving force of *Indian War of Independence*. Referring to Colonel James Neill's 'bloody assizes' in Allahabad, Savarkar writes:

Neill has killed as many people in Allahabad alone as all Englishmen, women and children who had been killed in throughout India in the Revolution, put together! And tens of such Neills were conducting massacres in hundreds of places! For every Englishman a whole village has been burnt! God will not forget this and we will, also, never forget this! And what do English historians say about this? . . . Kaye does not write a single word against Neill for this cruelty. But, instead of allowing man to discuss this question, he leaves it to God! . . .

(IWI 205)

The passage then quotes Neill referring the matter to God, and also quotes the historian Holmes on Neill, before proceeding:

We fervently hope that impartial history, by examining the above extracts, and the true god—not Neill's God—will look sympathetically and forgivingly at the few massacres by the Revolutionaries than at these wholesale slaughterings by the English.

(IWI 206)

As Adorno suggests in his essay, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past” (1959), the conjunction of official, authoritarian positions with the will to forget has a

number of linked facets: the suspect politics of the seemingly reconciliatory call to forget, the idea of 'a forgetfulness that all too easily turns up with the justification of what has been forgotten' (99-100), and the official prescription to forget as a corollary of remembrance as a sign of resentment. Crucially, Savarkar's text, in his assertion of remembrance, remains paralysingly bound within these official configurations of 'forgetting': far from approaching a questioning posture against totalitarian and violent systems and events, his calls to remembrance enthusiastically embrace the dominant official link between remembering and revenge.

### **Savarkar and History; the Historiography of Savarkar**

Savarkar's *Indian War of Independence* constitutively posits itself as 'historical' writing and reveals its contiguity with British mutiny histories in the ways outlined above. Yet this enthusiastic and instrumentalist embracement of historical writing, and the wholesale seizing of the mutiny narrative to produce a counternarrative, is complicated by Savarkar's admission of the possibility of another kind of history of 1857. Savarkar's 'Introduction' appears to posit the idea of an alternative, 'authentic' history of the revolt, one that can be written through accessing and recovery of oral traditions:

As almost all the authorities on which this work is based are English authors, for whom it must have been impossible to paint the account of the other side as elaborately and as faithfully as they have done their own, it is perfectly possible that many a scene, other than what this book contains, might have been left unstated, and many a scene described in this book might be found to be have been wrongly described. But if some patriotic historian would go to

northern India and try to collect the traditions from the very mouths of those who witnessed and perhaps took a leading part in the War, the opportunity of knowing the exact account of this can still be caught, though unfortunately it will be impossible to do so before very long. When within a decade or two, the whole generation of those who took part in that war shall have passed never to return, not only would it be impossible to have the pleasure of seeing the actors themselves, but the history of their actions will have to be left permanently incomplete. Will any patriotic historian undertake to prevent this while it is not too late?

(Savarkar xxiv)

This statement is significant on various counts. Firstly, it suggests that even as Savarkar appropriates and inverts the British mutiny narrative, he stands in a position of proximity to it, while a more substantive tension emerges between his ad-hoc history and a 'real' history, absent and spectral. Secondly, even as the importance of an 'authentic' history is admitted, Savarkar does not consider the possibility of executing any portion of the task himself: instead the real history is a deferred project, delegated to someone else (an abstract 'patriotic historian') and projected somewhere else ('northern India'). Thirdly, for all its desirability, the possibility of the real history getting executed is doubly bounded—bounded on the one hand by deferral, the 'not yet' and on the other by the 'too late', the already materialising vision that 'the history of their actions will have to be left permanently incomplete'. This could also be seen as an early expression of a complex of notions repeated across subsequent Indian negotiations of the revolt—the idea of an unwritten history in relation to which all executed histories stand in a position of necessary ad-hocism, informed in particular by the trope of disappearing or disappeared generations.

Finally, another issue that needs attention in an analysis of *Indian War of Independence* is its place within the broader treatment of Savarkar in Indian historiography. While the influential status of this text is generally acknowledged, Savarkar's politics and personality have tended to be analysed on the basis of his other political writings and life, to the relative exclusion of *Indian War of Independence*.<sup>5</sup> For instance, Marzia Casolari's article 'Hindutva's Foreign Tie-Up in the 1930s: Archival Evidence' (2000) has produced a substantial body of archival material to demonstrate that the link between rising Hindu radical ideology in the first half of the twentieth century, and Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany is neither simply an effect of the academic employment of 'fascism' as an abstraction, nor of a diffuse drawing of inspiration of the former from the later. Instead the essay argues that the links between the Hindu Mahasabha and RSS ideologues, and leaders such as Mussolini were actual; that there was an active modelling of the Mahasabha on Italian Fascist patterns; and finally that the late 1930s saw a series of statements from Savarkar supporting and glorifying the Nazi programme of national revival and its treatment of Jews. Savarkar in some of these statements took issue with Nehru 'that he took sides in the name of all Indians against Germany or Italy', while 'the very fact that Germany or Italy has so wonderfully recovered and grown so powerful as never before at the touch of Nazi or Fascist magical wand is enough to prove that those political "isms" were the most congenial tonics their health demanded' (qtd. in Casolari 223). In 2002, A.G. Noorani's *Savarkar and Hindutva: The Godse Connection* used newspaper archives, interviews, published books and documents of courtroom proceedings to map the personality, career and political legacy of V.D. Savarkar. Noorani makes a case for

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<sup>5</sup> The history of its proscription by the government, as well as its status as inaugurating an Indian appropriation of 1857 may have contributed to its somewhat canonical status in the nationalist imaginary, rendering it discursively resistant to the same level of interrogation as has attended his other works.

Savarkar's key though covert participation in a number of assassinations, including Gandhi's. Sumit Sarkar's essay "Hindutva and History" in his 2002 book *Beyond Nationalist Frames* considers the question of 'history' as a highly valued discourse by the Hindu Right, but he makes his argument about Savarkar with reference to his 1923 book *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu*. Jyotirmaya Sharma in his 2007 article "History as Revenge and Retaliation: Rereading Savarkar's *The War of Independence of 1857*" has rightly drawn attention towards 'the terrifying set of propositions introduced by Savarkar into the Indian political vocabulary' and the fact that 'even those who differ from his conception of Hindutva seem to acknowledge his nationalism, patriotism and commitment to the cause of India's freedom, often overlooking the model of retributive violence and its philosophical justification'(1719). Yet, Sharma finds it necessary to approach his reading of *Indian War of Independence* by a reading of another essay by Savarkar, "How Those Working for Hindu Consolidation Ought to Write and Read the History of Their Own Nation" (Sharma 1717-1718).

Indeed, it is possible to identify this as a historiographical gap, in which Savarkar's discursive and ideological positions have been taken into account with reference to his later writings on Hindutva, or with his historical connection with Nazism, but have tended not to be seen in their completeness and detail as presented in *Indian War of Independence*. Instead my reading of *Indian War of Independence* has attempted to show that the historical, historiographical and ideological coordinates of Savarkar's political stances are all patently present in this early text itself. As an illustration of the dominant historiographical rift, one could refer for instance to Vinayak Chaturvedi's recent and otherwise insightful essay on Savarkar, "Rethinking Knowledge with Action: V.D. Savarkar, the Bhagavad Gita, and Histories of Warfare" (2010), in which Chaturvedi voices the widely held idea of a 'shift' in Savarkar's

identification of the enemy:

Savarkar does not elaborate on what he means by the idea of a shared country or religion between Hindus and Muslims in *Indian War of Independence*. It is a theme that appears to be assumed in parts of Savarkar's writings at this point. I emphasize this in order to underscore the fact that there was an important shift in Savarkar's histories of warfare in *Hindu-Pad- Padshahi* [1925] and *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History* [1963]. While Savarkar argued for Indian independence from British rule in *Indian War of Independence*, his later works focussed on wars of Hindu independence from Christians and Muslims in India. (Chaturvedi 14)

A careful reading of Savarkar's *Indian War of Independence* however reveals that the text is informed by a consolidated communal binary. For instance, the brief 'Author's Introduction' declares at the outset: 'the feeling of hatred against Mahomedans was just and necessary in the times of Shivaji' (xxiii). The end of chapter 3 recounts 'the days when Hindus and Mahomedans unanimously raised the flag of national freedom at Delhi'. However this is visualised as a mere interlude in a continuous history of antagonism: 'These five days proclaimed by beat of drum *the end for the time being at any rate of the continuous fight between the Hindus and the Mahomedans*, dating from the invasion of Mahmud of Ghazni' (126, emphasis mine). Later, in the chapter "The Fall of Lucknow", Savarkar declaims: 'A rebellion long and deliberately concocted, a rebellion which had been able to carry the Hindu and the Mahomedan in *an unnatural confederacy*, a rebellion which is now manifestly nurtured and sustained by the whole population of Oudh . . .' (414, emphasis mine). Hence, an essentialised communal binary is maintained across this text: 1857 in Savarkar's narrative signals a brief, almost fabulous period of 'five days' of united action and feeling between Hindus and Muslims, an interlude conceived as completely out of the ordinary and



temporary. *The Indian War of Independence* thus markedly disavows a social imaginary of living together or of shared contexts between 'Hindus' and 'Mahomedans': only a supranarrative of political domination informs and energises the book.

### **Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* and 1857**

In 1906 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) visited London as part of a delegation of Indians from South Africa, hoping to lobby official opinion against a proposed anti-Indian legislation, the Transvaal law meant to enforce the registration of all Indians in the Transvaal. This was the occasion also for a meeting with Shyamji Krishnavarma. Gandhi spent two nights at India House and proposed peaceful disobedience as an alternative to violence, in discussions at which the young acolytes of Krishnavarma, including the newly arrived V.D. Savarkar, were present (R. Gandhi 119). The South African delegation met with disappointment: misled into hope by the administration in London, Gandhi returned to South Africa to find that the anti-Asian legislation had effectively only been withheld until the technical grant of self-government to South Africa. On 1 January 1907, self-government was granted to South Africa, and one of the first legislations to be enacted was the Transvaal Asiatic Registration Act. In Gandhi's politics this signalled a crystallisation of the sense of the non-consonance between official gestures of reassuring paternalism and the actuality of legal measures curtailing the rights of Indians.<sup>6</sup> In 1909, Gandhi was back in England, this time as an 'unwilling petitioner' (Hunt 99) regarding immigration laws

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6 'Then, [in 1906] he had relied on the legality of his case, and the reforming vitality of a Liberal Parliament, to present a petition most powerfully yet with most impeccable correctness to a government which must surely be swayed by argument. In the nearly three years which had elapsed between deputations, *satyagraha* had been born and matured. . . . Gandhi thus set out on the journey [1909] with his mind full of questions and doubts arising not from a sense of helplessness but from awareness of the new powers of work' (Hunt 104).

for Indians in South Africa. However, as Gandhi arrived in England on 10 July 1909, London was shaken by the assassination of Sir Curzon-Wylie, shot by Madan Lal Dhingra of the India House on 1 July. This time Gandhi stayed away from India House, and in the climate of outrage against all critics of the empire that Dhingra's act had predictably produced he plainly denounced this killing. Later that month, shortly before Dhingra was hanged, Gandhi wrote:

Every Indian should reflect thoughtfully on this murder. It has done India much harm; the deputation's efforts have also received a setback. But that need not be taken into taken into consideration. It is the ultimate result that we must think of. Mr. Dhingra's defence is inadmissible. In my view, he acted like a coward. All the same, one can only pity the man. He was egged on to do this act by ill-digested reading of worthless writings. His defence of himself, too, appears to have been learnt by rote. It is those who incited him to this that deserve to be punished. In my view, Mr. Dhingra himself is innocent. The murder was committed in a state of intoxication. It is not merely wine or bhang that makes one drunk; a mad idea can do so.<sup>7</sup>

(CWMG 9: 302)

On 24 October 1909, on the occasion of Vijayadashmi, a dinner was arranged by Savarkar and his group of students at which Gandhi was invited to preside. Both Savarkar and Gandhi spoke: Savarkar attempted to validate extremist violence by invoking the theme of rightful vengeance through Durga and the necessity of violence to establish justice through reference to the slaying of Ravan by Ram (Hunt 127); Gandhi in turn used the opportunity to address the large gathering of Indians against

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<sup>7</sup> Published in *Indian Opinion* on 14 August 1909.

violence, emphasising instead the themes of suffering, austerity and exile in the Ramayana. In a letter to Henry Polak written later that week, he recounted:

On Sunday last, I presided at the Dussera Festival Dinner. It was given practically by the extremist Committee. Nearly seventy Indians came. I accepted the proposal unhesitatingly so that I might speak to those who might assemble there on the uselessness of violence for securing reforms. This I did. My terms were that no controversial politics were to be touched upon and my terms were fully carried out. I drew the moral that I wished to point out from the *Ramayana*. The Dussera festival is a celebration of the victory of Rama over Ravana, i.e. of Truth over falsehood. I give you this information to enable you to see how I have been utilizing my time here. I have endeavoured to come in contact with as many Indians as I could. (CWMG 9: 504)

However, Gandhi was clearly swimming against the tide of popular Indian opinion and feeling in England at the time. As he recounted, during this trip he did not meet a single Indian who didn't believe in the necessity of violence.<sup>8</sup> During the Dussehra dinner itself, 'the October 1909 gathering was more interested in Savarkar than in Gandhi' (R. Gandhi 150). It was in this difficult context of negotiation with the British administration on the one hand and the extremist group on the other hand, that *Hind Swaraj* was engendered. Written in 10 days, between 13 and 22 November 1909, on board the ship Kildonan Castle during the return trip from England to South Africa, it was an urgent expression of an intensely felt need, with Gandhi writing 'at a furious pace . . . as if under inspiration' (Parel xiv). Its status as a culmination of the thoughts and activities intensely preoccupying Gandhi for some time comes through in the

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<sup>8</sup> 'I have practically met no one who does not believe that India can ever become free without resort to violence' (Letter to Lord Ampthill, October 1909, CWMG 9:509).

foreword:

I have written some chapters on the subject of Indian Home Rule, which I venture to place before the readers of *Indian Opinion*. I have written because I could not restrain myself. I have read much, I have pondered much, during the stay, for four months in London of the Transvaal Indian deputation. I discussed things with as many of my countrymen as I could meet. I met, too, as many Englishmen as it was possible for me to meet. (*Hind Swaraj* 9)

It was to be, significantly, Gandhi's seminal work, the kernel of his thought and political philosophy and also one to which he turned throughout his career, 'as if to the source of his inspiration' (Parel xiii). The key ideas of *Hind Swaraj* involved: a redefinition of swaraj as 'self rule' centred on personal self-control rather than as simply 'home rule', an eschewing of retaliation as a motive, and the substitution of violence with passive resistance and of physical force with soul-force. Informed by a deep critique of 'western civilisation', yet involving a careful distinction between the destructive effects of Western modernity (his target) and the people or original nature of the West, this text drew deeply from and acknowledged its consonance with a variety of sources: 'I have but endeavoured humbly to follow Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau, Emerson and other writers, besides the masters of Indian philosophy' (Preface to English translation, Parel 6).<sup>9</sup>

The profound antithesis that *Hind Swaraj* constitutes to Savarkar's *Indian War of Independence*, printed earlier in May that year, is evident at several levels. At the most obvious level there is a distinct contrast in the aesthetic character and stylistic features of the two texts. If Savarkar's 550-pages long book was modelled closely on

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9 While in London, in August 1909, Gandhi also draws a comparison between his campaign and the contemporary suffragette campaign, and concludes the piece condemning Curzon Wylie's murder with remarks on how much may be learnt from the suffragette movement (CWMG 9:303).

Victorian mutiny histories (in terms of length, aspiration to epic grandioseness, and employment of rhetoric), Gandhi's 125-page long text is strikingly spare and distilled, even misleadingly simple (Parel xvii).<sup>10</sup> These textual and discursive choices arguably reflect and constitute an extension of choices of political method. *Hind Swaraj* is hence directly opposed to the extremists' formula of appropriation and inversion, and instead aims for the creation of a distinct systemic and methodological turf. Refuting the extremist position through its dialogic mode, *Hind Swaraj* counters: 'you have well drawn the picture. In effect it means this: that we want the tiger's nature, but not the tiger' (28). It is significant that *Hind Swaraj*, though a critique of western modernity, employs a particular expression of modern print culture in the choice of the Editor-Reader paradigm for organising its constitutive dialogue.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the epic style and grandiose voice adopted by Savarkar harken back to nineteenth century mutiny history models.<sup>12</sup>

If Savarkar's framing choice of discourse is 'historical', *Hind Swaraj* is marked by an eschewing of historical discourse. Soul-force in the cause of peace is, according to Gandhi, natural to human existence, while 'history is really a record of every interruption of the even working of the force of love or of the soul' (90). He expands:

Two brothers quarrel; one of them repents and reawakens the love that was lying dormant in him; the two again begin to live in peace; nobody takes notice

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10 'On a casual reading the book may strike the reader as being a rather simple one. . . . But first impressions in this case can be, and are, deceptive, for the book contains in compressed form the author's conception of what modern India ought to become and how politics may be made into the highest form of the active life.' (Parel xvii). Gandhi himself described *Hind Swaraj* as 'that incredibly simple booklet' (1939, CWMG 70: 242), and 'a book which can be put into the hands of a child' (1921, CWMG 19: 277).

11 'The Reader is a composite of 'modern' Indians including the expatriates he had met in London in 1906 and 1909 (Parel 1).

12 The contrast in textual style and approach to rhetoric between Savarkar and Gandhi echoes the discursive difference seen between W.W. Hunter's work and that of Syed Ahmad Khan discussed in the previous chapter.

of this. But, if the two brothers . . . take up arms or go to law . . . their doings would be immediately noticed in the press, they would be the talk of their neighbours, and would probably go down to history. And what is true of families and communities is true of nations. History, then, is a record of an interruption of the course of nature. Soul-force, being natural, is not noted in history.

(*Hind Swaraj* 90)

Further, at one point writing history (associated with manipulating narratives about the past) is referred to as a British habit:

They have a habit of writing history; they pretend to study the manners and customs of all peoples. God has given us a limited mental capacity, but they usurp the function of the Godhead and indulge in novel experiments. They write about their own researches in the most laudatory terms and hypnotise us into believing them. We, in our ignorance, then fall at their feet.

(*Hind Swaraj* 56)

Insofar as Gandhi's 'booklet' is distinctly 'anti-historical', unlike Savarkar's text that lists dozens of British histories as 'important works consulted', Gandhi's 'recommended authorities' (listed in an appendix) include Tolstoy, Thoreau, Ruskin, Plato and Naoroji (120). *Hind Swaraj* consciously moors itself in philosophy and ethics, resisting participation in 'history' as metadiscourse.

It is in this larger context of questions of political and discursive methods that 1857 finds value and meaning in Gandhi's writing, particularly in the seminal *Hind Swaraj*. If Savarkar constructed an epic revolving around 1857 as a discursive

validation of his political ideology of revolutionary terrorism, Gandhi's antithesis contains only one reference to 1857, in a chapter titled 'Brute Force'(chapter 16 of 20):

The proclamation of 1857 was given at the end of a revolt, and for the purpose of preserving peace. When peace was secured and people became simple-minded, its full effect was toned down. If I ceased stealing for fear of punishment, I would recommence the operation as soon as the fear is withdrawn from me. This is almost a universal experience. We have assumed that we can get men to do things by force and, therefore, we use force.

(*Hind Swaraj* 79-80)

1857 in Gandhi's text is thus posited as an illustration of a failed *template*. Unlike Savarkar's account, or indeed in most historical narratives about the rebellion, colonialist and nationalist, here the failure of the revolt is not diagnosed as an inadequacy of rebel organisation, or other such specifics.<sup>13</sup> 1857 is invoked by Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* as an illustration of the essential and destined failure of force, the self-tripping mechanism of violent methods, its success being contingent on the perpetuation of fear in the antagonist, and lasting only the short term that the fear of violence does.

### **1857 in *Hind Swaraj*: A Metamorphosed Presence**

However, this reduced and inverse significance of 1857 in *Hind Swaraj* can also be placed in the longer trajectory of Gandhi's periodic and evolving negotiation of the rebellion. In 1891, when at the age of twenty-two had Gandhi finished his

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<sup>13</sup> In this sense, 'the causes of the failure of the revolt' as an analysis can be viewed as belonging generically to the same mode of inquiry as the inquiry about 'the causes of the revolt'.

education in the Law in London but felt inadequately prepared to enter into a career as a lawyer, he sought advice from jurist and orientalist, Frederick Pincutt. Recounting this incident at the end of the first part of his autobiography, Gandhi narrates that Pincutt, disappointed with Gandhi's general reading, recommended three books—two on physiognomy, and one on Indian history, Kaye's and Malleson's history of the mutiny (*Autobiography* 69-70). Gandhi recounts how Lavator's and Shemmelpennick's books on human physiognomy failed to teach him the skill of 'read[ing] a man's character from his face'. He continues: 'Mr. Pincutt's advice did me very little direct service, but his kindness stood me in good stead' (70). He further mentions that he 'could not read Kaye's and Malleson's volumes in England, but . . . did so in South Africa at the first opportunity'<sup>14</sup> (70). Gandhi desists from saying anything in particular about this experience.

Gandhi's focus in *Hind Swaraj* on the Queen's proclamation of 1858 was not in itself a new point of reference for him. In 1903 in the context of discriminatory legislation against Indians in South Africa, including proposals of compulsory repatriation of ex-indentured Indians, he wrote an article in *Indian Opinion* titled 'The Proclamation of 1858'.<sup>15</sup> Hailing this proclamation as the 'magna charta of the British Indians', this article invokes the loyalty of the masses of Indians during the rebellion:

And throughout India did the masses remain faithful, and refuse to make common cause with the mutineers. All this was known to Lord Canning. He, in due course, transmitted to the late Queen-Empress the pathetic incidents that took place when the British Indians, at the peril of their lives, saved hundreds of English men and women. (CWMG 3:357)

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<sup>14</sup> This was during 1893-94, his time in Pretoria (R. Gandhi 76).

<sup>15</sup> CWMG 3: 357-58.



The Queen's proclamation is here invoked as a direct expression of the guarantee of the well-deserved rights of subjecthood for the Indian people. The point especially emphasized in this piece is that the liberties granted by this proclamation are not to be impinged by the specific location of Indian subjects within the empire.

Is it then any wonder that the British Indians wherever they go, invoke the aid of that Proclamation in their favour whenever any attempt is made to curtail their liberties or their rights as British subjects? . . . Time and circumstances have thus combined to sanctify the Proclamation, and no matter what others may say to the contrary, it will ever remain a cherished treasure to the Indian community, wherever settled, so long as the British Empire lasts.

(CWMG 3: 358)

Gandhi's movement from this position in 1903, stressing the political possibilities of the Proclamation of 1858, to the obverse view of negating its significance in *Hind Swaraj* in 1909, reflects the grain of Gandhi's political development in the intervening years. In particular it embodies the coming together of several specific strands: a realisation of the radical unreliability of imperial paternalism as a guarantor of legal rights after his experience of the 1906 delegation, a resultant breakdown of the faith in imperial citizenship as a desirable goal, and a movement away from a legalistic framework towards an ethical-activist one. Thus in *Hind Swaraj*, both the violence represented by the revolt (and recently resurrected by Savarkar) as well as hope in imperial paternalism as a guarantor of legal rights (pursued by Gandhi himself till recently in his writing on the proclamation) are spent forces. This considered rejection of some of the major political and discursive

coordinates of the rebellion vitally informs the conception of *Hind Swaraj*.

Another experience that occurred to Gandhi in 1906 and that may have contributed to, and intersected with, his negotiation of 1857 was the Zulu rebellion that started in Natal in February of that year. Eager for Indians to be conscripted by the British for containing the rebellion as a means of attesting their subject status, he was eventually allowed to form an ambulance corps. However this role in the suppression of the revolt provided Gandhi with a fresh view of the workings of empire, an experience that he recounts in the *Autobiography*. In chapter 25, titled 'Heart Searchings' he writes:

The Zulu 'rebellion' was full of new experiences and gave me much food for thought. The Boer War had not brought home to me the horrors of war with anything like the vividness that the 'rebellion' did. This was no war but a man-hunt, not only in my opinion but in that of many Englishmen with whom I had occasion to talk. To hear every morning reports of the soldiers' rifles exploding like crackers in innocent hamlets, and to live in the midst of them was a trial. But I swallowed the bitter draught, especially as the work of my Corps consisted only in nursing the wounded Zulus. I could see that but for us the Zulus would have been uncared for. This work therefore, eased my conscience.

But there was much else to set one thinking. It was a sparsely populated part of the country. Few and far between in hills and dales were the scattered Kralls of the simple and so-called 'uncivilised' Zulus. Marching, with or without the wounded, through these solemn solitudes, I often fell into deep thought.

(*Autobiography* 263-264)

Moving from a political assessment of the conflict to the Romantic modality of moving across natural landscape and to the implicit affirmation of the simplicity of the 'uncivilised', this paragraph charts a progressive movement into the interiority of 'deep thought'. The remaining two pages of the chapter appear to move abruptly to his conviction for the need for *brahmacharya* for 'one aspiring to serve humanity with his whole soul' (264). The next chapter is titled 'The Birth of Satyagraha', demonstrating the vital connection between the Zulu rebellion experience and the crystallising of his new political theory and practice.

Rajmohan Gandhi has suggested that the experience of the brutal imperial suppression of the Zulu rebellion evoked in Gandhi's mind images of the 1857 reprisals, graphic accounts of which he had already read in the history by Kaye and Malleson: He was reminded of India's 1857 rebellion, which too witnessed great brutality, including floggings and the blowing of men off a cannon-mouth (118).<sup>16</sup> This may have led to a retrospective and crucial identification with the Zulus ("my heart was with the Zulus"), one not conspicuous in the Gandhi who had entered the battle as Sergeant-Major. Indeed, the accounts of violence employed during the suppression of the Zulu rebellion bear close comparison with images contained in narratives about 1857: massive public punitive killings, the burning and looting of entire villages, the executions of rebels by firing squads, including particularly colonial images of rebels facing these firing squads with quiet courage, and the calm dignity of martyrs.<sup>17</sup>

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16 Also 'The fact in Zululand of cannon-mouth killings, floggings and cruelties could not but have reminded Gandhi, who had only recently read the Kaye and Malleson volumes, of 1857' (Rajmohan Gandhi. "Re: 1857 Revolt and Gandhi." E-mail to the author. 5 Dec. 2010).

17 See for instance, Jeff Guy's *Remembering the Rebellion: The Zulu Uprising of 1906* (Scottsville: U of KwaZulu-Natal P, 2006), particularly pages 39, 44, 52, 104 and 149.

In the chapter following 'Brute Force', titled 'Passive Resistance', Gandhi writes:

Physical-force men are strangers to the courage that is requisite in a passive resister. Do you believe that a coward can ever disobey a law that he dislikes? Extremists are considered to be advocates of brute force. Why do they then talk about obeying laws? . . . A passive resister will say he will not obey a law that is against his conscience, even though he may be *blown to pieces at the mouth of a cannon*.  
(Hind Swaraj 93, emphases mine)

The image of cannon-mouth killings is repeated in the final chapter titled 'Conclusion'. In response to the Reader's question, 'What then would you say to the English? (113), the Editor answers:

If we wanted to fight with you on your own ground, we should be unable to do so; but if the above submissions be not acceptable to you, we cease to play the ruled. You may if you like, cut us to pieces. *You may shatter us at the cannon's mouth*. If you act contrary to our will, we will not help you, and without our help, we know that you cannot move one step forward.

(Hind Swaraj 114, emphases mine)

For a text that eschews descriptions of violence, as well as the use of dramatic rhetoric, these evocations of cannon-mouth killings suggest a particular adaptation and reconstitution of the inherited discourses and tropes of 1857 by Gandhi.

My reading of Gandhi and 1857 thus demonstrates that the commonsensical

view of the deletion of the rebellion from national memory due to a Gandhian embarrassment regarding Indian violence<sup>18</sup> calls for further investigation and nuancing. The complex and rich relationship of Gandhi and Gandhian thought with the rebellion is suggested by reading *Hind Swaraj* as an extended and considered antithesis to Savarkar's use and invocation of 1857 in *Indian War of Independence*, both texts at base being discourses about political method and the posing of foundational questions regarding Indian national modernity. In this context, the restricted referencing of 1857 in *Hind Swaraj* is not a measure of the absence, insignificance, or indeed erasure of the revolt in Gandhian thought but rather of a particular kind of metamorphosed presence that took into account its deep imprint in inherited colonial discourse, recently revived in Savarkar's text.<sup>19</sup> If, on the one hand, Gandhi's changing reading of the Proclamation from 1903 to 1909 is a measure of his active renegotiation of the received models of both colonial conflict and colonial peace as embodied in the mutiny narrative, on the other hand the residual violent images of these narratives (typified in the young Gandhi's reading of Kaye's and Malleson's history) appear to combine with the experience of the suppression of the Zulu revolt to become vital to the formulation of Satyagraha. The negated significance of the Proclamation in *Hind Swaraj*, its reference to 1857 as a model of the necessary failure of force ("Brute Force"), and its evocation of colonial suppression and resistance through the trope of cannon-mouth killings ("Conclusion") arguably suggest the constitutive ways in which 1857 informs this seminal Gandhian text.

Remembrance then takes a specific form in Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*. My reading

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18 See for instance, chapter on 'The Histories' in *Spectre of Violence* by Rudrangshu Mukherjee, particularly page 155.

19 For a similar thought see Ritu Birla and Faisal Devji: 'The project of non-violence, far from being the avoidance of violence, was for the Mahatma a call to engage with the problem of violence in ways that included toleration, ingestion, and finally sublimation' (266). ["Guest Editors' Letter: Itineraries of Self-Rule". *Public Culture* (23.2): 265-268.]

of this text has argued that far from being absent or ignored, the imprint of the political and discursive memory of 1857 is synthesized, internalised and reconfigured within a personal-political ethical horizon that is central to the evolution of Gandhian thought. The weapon of 'Historical writing', wielded alike by the Victorian mutiny historians and their twentieth century Indian followers is here unequivocally rejected as a possible space for ethical remembrance.

### **Jawaharlal Nehru, Life Writing and the Revolt**

In May 1908, when Savarkar organised a meeting at India House to commemorate the fifty-first anniversary of the Mutiny, and students were coming down to London from Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh to attend, the 19-year old Jawaharlal Nehru, at that time a student at Trinity College, Cambridge was definitely not an attendee. Nehru's *Autobiography* does not allude to Savarkar in particular, but in Chapter Four, 'Harrow and Cambridge', there are several references to the period c. 1907 as one of the rise of extremist politics among Indian students in England, as well as the religious revivalist nature of Indian nationalism in general in this phase:

From 1907 onwards for several years India was seething with unrest and trouble. . . . Almost without an exception we [Indians in England] were Tilakites or Extremists as the new party was called in India. (*Autobiography* 23)

Socially speaking, the revival of Indian nationalism in 1907 was definitely reactionary. Inevitably, a new nationalism in India, as elsewhere in the East, was a religious nationalism. (*Autobiography* 26)

There is a specific reference in this chapter to Shyamji Krishnavarma and India House:

In London we used to hear also of Shyamji Krishnavarma and his India House but I never met him or visited that house. Sometimes we saw his *Indian Sociologist*. Long afterwards, in 1926, I saw Shyamji in Geneva. His pockets still bulged with ancient copies of the *Indian Sociologist*, and he regarded almost every Indian who came near him as a spy sent by the British Government. (*Autobiography* 25)

These passages along with other descriptions of Shyamji Krishnavarma by Nehru have been usefully analysed by Alex Tickell to suggest the likely influence of Dickensian techniques of the comic grotesque (Tickell 27). However, this categorical distance from India House, similar though it seems to Gandhi's stance in London in the summer and autumn of 1909, panned out in a markedly differently negotiation with 1857 by Nehru in comparison with the Gandhian treatment of the rebellion. To chart the complexities of Nehru's treatment of 1857 I will read in detail some key passages from the *Autobiography* (1936), and *The Discovery of India* (1946). First, as has often been commented upon, both these texts show a narrative imbrication of the personal and political, the individual and the national. Along with *Glimpses of World History* (1934), they have been usefully described by Sunil Khilnani as forming 'the elements of a complex triptych' (148). Insofar as Nehru's *Autobiography* and *Discovery* function as complex inter-reflective Bildungsromans of the personal and the national, the story of the growth of Nehru's self into adulthood is strongly figurative of the coming-of-age story of the nation that he writes. Within this context I

will refer in particular to Nehru's broad deployment of ideas from psychoanalysis as providing a discursive framework for remembering in these texts.<sup>20</sup>

The *Autobiography* has two early and significant references to the rebellion. The first occurs on the second page of the text, in the context of Nehru's narrative of the historical background and fortunes of his family. Chapter One, titled 'Descent from Kashmir' relates the history of the migration of an ancestor in the eighteenth century from Kashmir to Delhi 'probably at the Emperor's [Farrukhsiyar's] insistence', the grant of a jagir, and the proximity of the jagir to the canal that gave the family name 'Nehru'. The family's connection with the Mughal court and its changing fortunes was maintained till the time of Nehru's grandfather, 'Kotwal of Delhi for some time before the great Revolt of 1857' (2). When the Revolt occurs it brings upheaval and dislocation for the Nehru family, as well as physical threat. In a detailed and key paragraph, Nehru writes:

The Revolt of 1857 put an end to our family's connection with Delhi, and all our old family papers and documents were destroyed in the course of it. The family, having lost nearly all that it possessed, joined the numerous fugitives who were leaving the old imperial city and went to Agra. My father was not born then but my two uncles were already young men and possessed some knowledge of English. This knowledge saved the younger of the two uncles, as well as some other members of the family from a sudden and ignominious end. He was journeying from Delhi with some family members, among whom was his young sister, a little girl who was very fair, as some Kashmiri children

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20 For the significant presence of the idea of the 'psychological' in these narratives see Javed Majeed: 'The mental language of Nehru's autobiographies is especially evident in his deployment of the term "psychological"'. He argues that "the primary test of the book is psychological". Elsewhere, he argues that the "value" of the book lies less in its factual details, and more in its depiction of the "psychological background to happenings in India" (33).



are. Some English soldiers met them on the way and they suspected this little aunt of mine to be an English girl and accused my uncle of kidnapping her. From an accusation, to summary justice and punishment, was usually a matter of minutes in those days, and my uncle and others of the family might well have found themselves hanging on the nearest tree. Fortunately for them, my uncle's knowledge of English delayed matters a little and then someone who knew him passed that way and rescued him and the others.

*(Autobiography 2)*

An obvious aspect of Nehru's treatment of 1857 that distinguishes it from that of Savarkar and Gandhi is, firstly, the personal, familial motif, and the key idea of the transmission of impressions of the revolt within the matrix of family memory and personal narratives. Secondly, the initial pages of the autobiography as a text that functions on the interweaving of the personal and the national-historical foreground the constitutive significance of 1857 for the transition into colonial modernity. In this, the role of the English language and the inhabiting of/access to the knowledge grid it implies are particularly significant, as this narrative of near destruction and narrow escape hinges on the timely and life-saving function performed by knowledge of the English language. Thirdly, the narrative of loss and dislocation is also eventually a narrative of escape and survival, and of the continued flourishing of the family fortunes in Agra and Allahabad.

The second reference to the rebellion follows closely, in the second chapter, entitled 'Childhood'. Nehru recounts his relationship with his parents as one of distance, fear and admiration for his father, and of greater proximity, comfort and association with his mother:

I admired father tremendously. He seemed to me the embodiment of strength and courage and cleverness, far above all the other men I saw, and I treasured the hope that when I grew up I would be rather like him. But much as I admired him and loved him, I feared him also. . . . Not so with my mother. I had no fear of her, for I knew that she would condone everything I did, and because of her excessive and indiscriminating love for me, I tried to dominate over her a little. I saw much more of her than I did of father and she seemed nearer to me and I would confide in her when I would not dream of doing so to father.

*(Autobiography 8-9)*

Immediately after this account of his parents, he proceeds to describe a third adult figure, the only other mentioned here;

Another of my early confidants was a munshi of my father's, Munshi Mubarak Ali. He came from a well-to-do family of Badaun. The Revolt of 1857 had ruined the family and the English troops had partly exterminated it. This affliction had made him gentle and forbearing with everybody, especially children, and for me he was a sure haven of refuge whenever I was unhappy or in trouble. With his fine grey beard he seemed to my young eyes very ancient and full of old-time lore, and I used to snuggle up to him and listen, wide eyed, by the hour to his innumerable stories—old tales from the Arabian Nights or other sources, or accounts of the happenings in 1857 or 1858. It was many years later, when I was grown up, that “Munshiji” died, and the memory of him still remains with me a dear and close possession.

*(Autobiography 9)*

This description of Munshi Mubarak Ali has several significant strands and aspects to it, which are relevant to this discussion. Firstly, the counterpoint with Motilal Nehru as the figure of the forbidding father is obvious. The coming together of the strands of the familial and political through the conduit of psychoanalytical vocabulary has been suggested by David Arnold among others: 'In keeping with this psychoanalytic vein, Nehru's autobiography is also about his struggle with the two dominant personalities in his life. . . . These commanding figures are his father Motilal, branded an "extrovert," and Gandhi, labeled an "introvert"' ("The Self and the Cell", 49). My reading of this passage from the *Autobiography* also suggests that the charting of a childhood self against the potentiality of adulthood appears to be attempted here in relation to a contrast between Motilal Nehru and another parental male character, Munshi Mubarak Ali. Secondly, the story of Munshi Mubarak Ali forms a counterpoint to the narrative of the Nehru family's survival and success after the revolt recounted just seven pages earlier. Munshi Mubarak Ali's family story is one of realised 'ruin' and 'extermination', rather than only a potential one as with the Nehrus. For Nehru, the historical paternal narrative of survival and success seems to find its culmination in the accomplished figure of the father as 'the embodiment of strength and courage and cleverness, far above all the other men I saw', a figure worthy of emulation and aspiration: 'I treasured the hope that when I grew up I would be rather like him', even if also simultaneously a figure of distance and fear. By contrast, Munshi Mubarak Ali appears to be an alternative figure of an adult male, a counterpoint to Motilal Nehru in being a locus of affect and comfort, a 'sure haven of refuge', in this more akin to the figure of the mother, but with a special quality that Nehru the narrator links directly to the Munshi's experiences of loss in 1857: '*This affliction* had made him gentle and forbearing with everybody, especially children,

and for me he was a sure haven of refuge whenever I was unhappy or in trouble' (emphasis mine). If affliction and gentleness mark the figure of Munshi Mubarak Ali, Motilal Nehru as the embodiment of worldly male success is signified by his full throated laughter: 'In the evenings usually many friends came to visit father and he would relax after the tension of the day and the house would resound with his tremendous laughter. His laugh became famous in Allahabad' (*Autobiography* 7-8). Thus, the narrative of the Nehru family's survival and that of Munshi Mubarak Ali's family's ruin during the rebellion can be read as contrasting configurations— of a successful passage into colonial modernity in the case of one, and of an afflicted existence in 'tradition' in that of the other. In the first narrative, the significance of knowing the English language occupies a pivotal role, while Munshi Mubarak Ali seems to be an embodiment of traditional discourse— 'his fine grey beard' announces his 'ancientness' and coalesces with 'old-time lore' and 'old tales from the Arabian nights'.<sup>21</sup>

Philip Holden has pointed out that Nehru in his autobiographical writing differentiates himself 'by relational strategies from two other men, Gandhi and his father, whom Nehru describes as Walter Pater's saint and epicure: 'the man of religion, who went through life rejecting what it offered in the way of sensation and physical pleasure, and . . . an epicure, who accepted life and welcomed and enjoyed its many sensations,' seeking a middle way between asceticism and indulgence (92). It is interesting to consider if this relational strategy is foreshadowed in these early passages from the autobiography, with Munshi Mubarak Ali in some ways providing a

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21 I have here drawn from Aamir Mufti's reading of Nehru's assessment of Azad as a 'traditional' personality rather than a 'modern' one: 'What Nehru means by the latter phrase is, of course, assimilation into the Anglophone middle class-- "English" education, English as the primary language of communication, public and private, and formation in a cultural hierarchy in which English functions as the pristine sign of modernity. The vernacular languages and their textual traditions, and "classical" education of one or the other sort, are here unequivocal signs of underdevelopment and inimical to the modern temperament, personality, or "type"' (Mufti 156).

prototype of the Gandhi figure through his associations with affliction, femininity, forbearance and tradition. In this context, my next reading will also explore the idea that the strategies used to render Gandhian nationalism a mere interlude, requiring ultimate control and containment for the coming of age of Indian nationalism, as argued by Partha Chatterjee,<sup>22</sup> seem to be foreshadowed here as well in Nehru's coming of age narrative.

The tropes of affliction, affect and story-telling blend and coalesce in the figure of Munshi Mubarak Ali. His affection and gentleness towards children, arising from his 'affliction', manifests itself in 'old tales from the Arabian Nights or other sources, or accounts of the happenings in 1857 or 1858'. Through this complex of associations however, Munshi Mubarak Ali virtually seems to become one with the tales he tells, almost divested of his reality:

With his fine grey beard he seemed to my young eyes very ancient and full of old-time lore, and I used to snuggle up to him and listen, wide eyed, by the hour to his innumerable stories—old tales from the Arabian Nights or other sources, or accounts of the happenings in 1857 or 1858. (*Autobiography* 9)

Significantly enough, by the end of this rich passage, the very historicity of Munshi Mubarak Ali's experiences is rendered diffuse and romanticised through their coalescing with 'old tales from the Arabian Nights'. The last sentence of the paragraph: 'It was many years later, when I was grown up, that "Munshiji" died, and the memory of him still remains with me a dear and close possession'(9), enacts some

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<sup>22</sup> See *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (146-157). Chatterjee summarises Nehru's negotiation of Gandhi for the realisation of the nationalist project: 'The disjuncture between the philosophy and the politics could be successfully handled only as long as the detour was recognised as a detour, a move into a 'special field'. When the time came to resume the real course of history, that philosophy could only act as a source of confusion and had to be firmly rejected' (157).

further significant steps in Nehru's negotiation of the phenomenon of Munshi Mubarak Ali. In this sentence, Nehru appears to take a distancing step away into adult consciousness and rationality ('many years later, when I was grown up'), with the quotation marks around "Munshiji" reinforcing the adult framing of childhood affect. Finally in this progressive movement of abstraction and control, "Munshiji" is inscribed as a *memory*, which for the adult Jawaharlal Nehru is 'a dear and close *possession*' (italics mine). The passage thus charts the evolving role and place of Munshi Mubarak Ali from an object of affect to a contained memory.

This account of Munshi Mubarak Ali in close connection with traditional narrative necessarily recalls Benjamin's "The Storyteller":

Memory creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation. In the first place among these is the one practiced by the storyteller. It starts the web which all stories form in the end. One ties on to the next, as the great storytellers, particularly the oriental ones have always readily shown. In each of them there is a Scheherzade who thinks of a fresh story whenever her tale comes to a stop. (*Illuminations* 97)

The negotiation of Munshi Mubarak Ali in Nehru's *Autobiography* suggests that the dynamic continuum of memory as web is sought to be contained in the stasis of possession as it is incorporated into the progressive logic of personal and national development: an attempted overcoming of the past for the successful enactment of the coming of age story. However, both the certainties of the personal-national coming-of-age story and the configuration of 'accounts of the happenings in 1857 or 1858' with romance and fantasy seem to undergo a revisitation in Nehru's next book,

**Nehru, Writing the Nation and the Ghosts of the Revolt**

Published after a gap of a decade from the *Autobiography*, *The Discovery of India* was written at the height of the Second World War, between April and September 1944.<sup>23</sup> Registering the implications of both the War and the complicated Indian politics of the intervening decade, it is marked by anxiety, doubts, and the difficulty of finding clear resolutions. As Sunil Khilnani has pointed out regarding *Discovery*: 'Although conventionally read as a statement of Indian nationalism on the eve of independence, in fact it is not at all triumphalist in tone: there is, rather, a gravity, even melancholy, to it' (153). In the first chapter, Nehru articulates his sense of uncertainty and the change this marked from his position 'some years earlier':

The events of the past few years in India, China, Europe, and all over the world have become confusing, upsetting and distressing, and the future has become vague and shadowy and has lost that clearness of outline which it once possessed in my mind. . . . No longer could I function, as I did in my younger days, as an arrow flying automatically to the target of my choice ignoring all else but that target. . . .

The ideals and objectives of yesterday were still the ideals of today, but they had lost some of their lustre and, even as one seemed to go towards them, they lost the shining beauty which had warmed the heart and vitalized the body. Evil triumphed often enough, but what was far worse was the coarsening and distortion of what seemed so right. . . .

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23 See Nehru's 'Preface', p. xiii.

Ends and means: were they tied up inseparably, acting and reacting on each other, the wrong means distorting and sometimes even destroying the end in view? . . .

What then was one to do? Not to act was a complete confession of failure and a submission to evil; to act meant often enough a compromise with some form of that evil, with all the untoward consequences that such compromises result in.

My early approach to life's problems had been more or less scientific, with something of the easy optimism of the science of nineteenth and early twentieth century. A secure and comfortable existence and the energy and self-confidence I possessed increased that feeling of optimism. A kind of vague humanism appealed to me.

. . . . Science does not tell us much, or for that matter anything of the purpose of life. (*Discovery* 12-14)

This extended quotation underlines the introspective, almost Hamletesque narrative of doubt and qualification, thought and counter-thought, as the narration of Nehru's consciousness through its flux and movement registers the difficulty of resolution.

In *Discovery* the revolt is treated in a section over five pages long titled '*The Great Revolt of 1857. Racialism*'. The section begins with a resume of the results of 'nearly a century of British rule':

Bengal had accommodated itself to it; the peasantry devastated by famine and crushed by new economic burdens, the new intelligentsia looking to the West and hoping that progress would come through English liberalism. So also,



more or less in the south and western India, in Madras and Bombay. But in the upper provinces there was no such submission or accommodation and the spirit of revolt was growing, especially among the feudal chiefs and their followers. Even in the masses discontent and an intense anti-British feeling were widespread. The upper classes keenly resented the insulting and overbearing manners of the foreigners, the people generally suffered from the rapacity and ignorance of the officials of the East India Company, who ignored their time honoured customs and paid no heed to what the people of the country thought. *(Discovery 352)*

The next passage quotes Sir Thomas Munro on the 'debase[ment of] a whole people', their treatment with scorn and their stigmatising as 'unworthy of trust' (352). The narrative then moves on to the outbreak of the revolt in Meerut: 'It was much more than a military mutiny and it spread rapidly and assumed the character of a popular rebellion and a war of Indian independence'. Nehru's narrative assesses the role of various communities ('both Hindus and Muslims took full part in the Revolt'), the feudal character of the revolt's leadership, the ambivalent position of many of its leaders, the support lent to the British by the Gurkhas and the Sikhs, some heroic figures thrown up by the revolt, and, crucially, the lack of modern nationalism and democratic goals as the synoptic cause for the failure of the rebellion:

It is clear, however, that there was a lack of nationalist feeling, which might have bound the people of India together. Nationalism of the modern type was yet to come; India had still to go through much sorrow and travail before she learnt the lesson, which would give her real freedom. Not by fighting for a lost cause, the feudal order, would freedom come. *(Discovery 354)*

The next section proceeds to the British memorialisation of the Mutiny and the lack of concomitant memorials for the Indian dead, broadening into a larger theme of memory. This theme is focussed on an intricate dialectic of 'remembering' and 'forgetting':

The rebel Indians sometimes indulged in cruel and barbarous behaviour; they were unorganized, suppressed, and often angered by reports of British excesses. But there is another side to the picture also that impressed itself on the *mind* of India, and in my own province especially the *memory* of it persists in town and village. One would like to *forget* all this, for it is a ghastly and horrible picture showing man at his worst, even according to the new standards of barbarity set up by Nazism and modern war. But it can only be *forgotten*, or *remembered* in a detached impersonal way, when it becomes truly the past with nothing to connect it with the present. So long as the connecting links and *reminders* are present, and the spirit behind those events survives and shows itself, that *memory* also will endure and influence our people. Attempts to suppress that picture do not destroy it but drive it deeper in the *mind*. Only by dealing with it normally can its effect be lessened.

(*Discovery* 354, emphases mine)

Several significant features mark this passage, which provide the terms for the rest of the section. Firstly, reference to the 'the mind of India' prepares the ground for giving a psychological dimension to India, an entity frequently personified in the *Discovery*. Secondly, Nehru posits the complicated coordinates of forgetting and remembering: forgetting is desirable, remembering in a detached way is a kind of forgetting, yet the

survival of the spirit behind those events serves as a necessary reminder. What is generated is, a conflicted, ambivalent and shifting set of values centred around the choices of remembering and forgetting the revolt for “the mind of India”. Thirdly, informing this complicated bind of remembering/forgetting the rebellion at the near-end of colonial rule and the anticipated inauguration of Indian democracy (brought together in Nehru’s nationalist discourse), is a psychoanalytic model suggestive of India as the patient, the rebellion as a trauma, remembering as both alternately symptom and treatment, and ‘normality’ of detached remembering as an eventual desideratum. Lastly and significantly, British retribution and violence are expressly compared with the Nazi regime.

The following paragraph proceeds to mention the ‘great deal of false and perverted history . . . written about the Revolt and its suppression’. It then mentions both the absence of the Indian view from the printed page, and refers particularly to Savarkar’s book: ‘Savarkar wrote *The History of the War of Indian Independence* some thirty years ago, but his book was promptly banned and is banned still’ (355). Nehru then proceeds to give quotations about the nature of British violence from the work of ‘some frank and honourable English historians’, which ‘make one sick with horror’ (355). The two overarching issues of the persistent Indian memory of 1857 and the comparison of British violence with Nazism then critically inform the rest of the section:

It is hateful to have to refer to this past history, but the spirit behind these events did not end with them. It survived, and whenever a crisis comes or nerves give way, it is in evidence again. The world knows about Amritsar and Jallianwala Bagh, but it does not know of much that has happened since the

days of the Mutiny, much that has taken place even in recent years and in our time, which has embittered the present generation. Imperialism and the domination of one people over another is bad, and so is racialism. But imperialism plus racialism can only lead to horror and ultimately to the degradation of all concerned with them. . . . Since Hitler emerged from obscurity and became the Fuehrer of Germany, we have heard a great deal about racialism and the Nazi theory of the *herrenvolk*. . . . But we in India have known racialism in all its forms ever since the commencement of British rule. The whole ideology of this rule was that of the *herrenvolk* and the master race, and the structure of government was based upon it; indeed the idea of a master race is inherent in imperialism . . . Generation after generation and year after year, India as a nation and Indians as individuals were subjected to insult, humiliation, and contemptuous treatment. The English were an imperial race, we were told, with the God-given right to govern us and keep us in subjection; if we protested we were reminded of the 'tiger qualities of an imperial race'.

(*Discovery* 356)

Then returning to the broad theme of memory, Nehru continues:

As an Indian, I am ashamed to write all this, for the memory of it hurts, and what hurts still more is the fact that we submitted for so long to this degradation. I would have preferred any kind of resistance to this, whatever the consequences, rather than our people should endure this treatment. And yet it is better that both Indians and Englishmen should know it, for that is the psychological background of England's connection with India, and

psychology counts and racial memories are long. (Discovery 356)

Reading the sections on 1857 in the *Autobiography* and *Discovery* together yield a number of interesting and significant observations. Firstly, the more personalised and familial narratives of the rebellion in the *Autobiography*, those of the Nehrus and of Munshi Mubarak Ali, are substituted in *Discovery* by the narrative of the nation. Secondly and concomitantly, the predominant focal point of the narrative shifts from Nehru speaking about his own mind to his speaking of and for 'the mind of India'. The psychoanalytical model is however complicated by the double and alternating role of Nehru: on the one hand an analyst and therapist bearing tidings of 'normalcy', he repeatedly shades into and becomes coterminous with the country, reflecting the trauma of memory in his own doubts, anger, conflicts and torment ('One would like to forget all this'; 'I am ashamed to write all this'; 'the memory of it hurts'). In contrast to the *Autobiography*, where 'memory' is evoked as a stable sign under which the narratives of the Nehru family and Munshi Mubarak Ali are smoothly resolved, in *Discovery* the memory of the revolt emerges as a fraught, troubled and tormented space. The near-end of colonial rule and the anticipation of Indian democracy are brought together in the moment of Nehru's nationalist narrative in *Discovery*, but significantly this text also seems to become the site of the return of the ghosts of the mutiny.

Thirdly, the reference to Nazism as a point of comparison to indict British violence clearly reflects the historical moment of writing during the Second World War and projects its implications into the history of colonial rule. A key word used by Nehru here is 'barbarity': British colonial violence presents 'a ghastly and horrible picture showing man at his worst, even according to the new standards of barbarity set

up by Nazism and modern war'(354). Yet, it is significant that the treatment of the rebellion in the *Discovery* includes at a key point a reference to Savarkar and his book on the revolt, as signifying the suppressed Indian view:

A great deal of false and perverted history has been written about the Revolt and its suppression. What the Indians think about it rarely finds its way to the printed page. Savarkar wrote *The History of the War of Independence* some thirty years ago, but his book was promptly banned and is banned still.

(*Discovery* 355)

This reference to Savarkar emerges in conflict with the larger indictment of Nazism in Nehru's passage here, appearing as it does to ignore the fact of Savarkar's historical collaboration with fascism and Nazism and the overt ideological alignment with and celebration by Savarkar of the same. As I have argued in the first section of this chapter, a careful reading of Savarkar's *Indian War of Independence* reveals its glorification of the revenge motive, its visceral dependence on racial binaries and its ideological ratification of genocide. These clearly manifest the links of *Indian War of Independence* both with the European ideological sources for right-wing Hindu politics in the early twentieth century, and with Savarkar's other, subsequent writings that have remained unaccommodable in the secularist vision of modern India. This neutral inclusion of Savarkar in *Discovery*, especially in comparison to the careful distance from India House expressed in the *Autobiography*, signals an unresolved element of Indian nationalism, and of the national narrative on the eve of independence.

In his essay "The Meaning of Working through the Past", Adorno has

suggested the vital significance of Freudian psychoanalytic understanding as a counter to anti-Semitic thought:

A precise and undiluted knowledge of Freudian theory is more necessary and relevant today than ever. The hatred of it is directly of a piece with anti-Semitism, by no means simply because Freud was a Jew but rather because psychoanalysis consists precisely of that critical self-reflection that makes anti-Semites livid with rage. (*Critical Models* 101)

Arguably, Nehru's adoption of the psychoanalytic mode as the overarching frame of his reminiscences facilitates a critical self-reflection that brings unresolved conflicts in the personal-national to the fore of his narrative. At the same time his alignment with 'the moment of arrival' of nationalism, defined by the investment in 'the monistic progression of real history' (Partha Chatterjee 157), seems to influence the appearance of Savarkar within the troubled narrative of 1857 in *Discovery*. As Partha Chatterjee has argued, the moment of arrival includes a justificatory structure in which 'some possibilities are emphasised, others erased . . . *marks of disjuncture are suppressed* and the rational continuity of a progressive historical development established' (Partha Chatterjee 52, emphasis mine). In its remembering and configuring of the revolt, Nehru's discourse stands as markedly distinct from those of Savarkar and Gandhi. Yet if, as Partha Chatterjee suggests, 'it is in the writings of this principal political architect of the new Indian state that one can find, more clearly than anywhere else, the key ideological elements and relations of nationalist thought at its moment of arrival' (132), the divided, fraught, and complicated dynamic of forgetting and remembering 1857 in Nehru's texts might also be considered an influential and possibly dominant model imprinted in the national imagination.

### **Qurratulain Hyder's *Aag ka Darya*: 1857 and Epochal Change**

Qurratulain Hyder (1928-2007) is best known for her 1959 magnum opus *Aag ka Darya*, which has been said to be to Urdu writing what Garcia Marquez's *One Thousand Years of Solitude* is to Latin American literature.<sup>24</sup> The 'structural innovation' of *Aag ka Darya* as Kumkum Sangari has pointed out, 'lay in the staging of four historical periods: the fourth century BC and the inception of the Mauryan Empire by Chandragupta, the end of the Lodi dynasty and the beginning of the Mughal rule in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the late eighteenth - century beginnings of East India Company rule up till its consolidation in the 1870s, and the two decades ending in the 1950s that encompassed nationalist struggle, partition and independence' (21). This panoramic view of Indian history is held together by a vision of continuity in change focussed through central characters that appear and reappear through the ages in changed forms yet showing marked continuities through names, personalities, and plot motifs. Published in 1959, it is patently comparable and connected to Jawaharlal Nehru's nationalist narratives, particularly *The Discovery of India*. The major points of connection and contiguity between the two texts include an episodic exploration of India's past to negotiate a complex present at the end of British colonial rule, and an investment in a plural and layered vision of Indian history articulating a secular nationalism. Additionally, it is arguable that the imbrication of the personal and national as it played out in the Nehru narrative is also present in *Aag ka Darya*. This is partly due to the fact of its being a novel containing fictional characters given to reflection, whose destinies intersect with their historical moments. Secondly, published in 1959, it was written by Hyder during

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24 See review of *River of Fire* by Aamer Hussein: 'Chaos and Upheaval'. *Times Literary Supplement* 6 Nov. 1998.



a period when she had migrated to Pakistan following the Partition: disillusioned with the cultural-political formations that had emerged on the subcontinent, particularly in Pakistan, she wrote this novel suggesting a counter-history of civilizational continuum. Born and bred in the syncretic culture of Uttar Pradesh, and with most of her youth spent in cosmopolitan Lucknow, Hyder shared this broad cultural matrix with Nehru. Already ill at ease in Pakistan, the antagonistic response generated by the novel probably contributed to her return to India in the early 1960s.<sup>25</sup>

*Aag ka Darya* devotes at least six of its 101 chapters to a portrayal of the change and disruption signalled by the rebellion. This section of the novel (chapters 28-33) is plotted around the interaction between two central characters, Gautam Nilambar Dutt, a young Bengali clerk in the employ of the East India Company in Calcutta, and Nawab Abdul Mansoor Kamaluddin (Nawab Kamman), a 24-year old *talukdar*-poet based in Lucknow who is leading a life typical of the Awadh aristocracy. Their acquaintance spans five critical decades, beginning in the early 1820s and continuing till the early 1870s, while political control passes directly to the British crown. The events around the rebellion in north India serve as the watershed moment for a radical reconfiguration of culture and power. This enables a narrative portrayal of epochal change, particularly plotted around two meetings between the characters, respectively their first and final ones. The first meeting between Gautam Nilambar Dutt and Nawab Kamman takes place in the 1820s. Gautam Nilambar Dutt,

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25 For an account of this return, see Laurel Steel's article "'We Just Stayed on the Ship to Bombay . . .' Tea and Consequences with Qurratulain Hyder": 'When I visited her she told me about her return to India, having first gone to Pakistan after Partition. One sentence echoed in my mind for years: "We were coming back from London, and instead of getting off in Karachi, we just stayed on the ship to Bombay". She was talking acidly of Pakistan and its politics. She recalled that after the outcry over her 1959 novel *Aag ka Darya* there was no way for her to remain in Pakistan. The very geography of her remark about sailing past Karachi struck me. I could see the boat, harboured just off the sunbaked city, swaying in the waters of the Arabian Sea. The city names: London, Karachi, Bombay were as familiar as say running one's fingers over a map—and yet the decision to return to India, made within the axis of these cities, was so final and complex' (*The Annual of Urdu Studies* 23[2008]: 182-195).

on an official East India company errand from Calcutta to the Lucknow residency during the time of Vajid Ali Shah, is also the bearer of a private message from the bibi of his English officer Cyril Ashley that takes him to the house of a famous courtesan of Lucknow, Champa Jaan. As a first-time visitor to Awadh, Gautam is a stranger to its linguistic mores and cultural forms. Having internalised colonial ideas of western superiority he is wonder-struck that there are still places in the country ruled by native kings, and feels a strange pleasure (*'ajeeb si musarrat'*, 246). His encounters with both commoners and the high-born bring out his position as a novice into the ways and culture of Awadh; the local populace treats the young man with mild amusement and indulgence, with only the fact of his being in the employ of the 'Company Bahadur' drawing a response of slight distance.

When a highly self-conscious and hesitant Gautam Nilambar Dutt finds himself in the soiree of Champa Jaan, the chief guest and patron there is Nawab Kamman and the following exchange takes place:

(GND) 'I don't have an estate. I am employed.'

(NK) 'Employed'.

Now Nilambar felt the same irritation that he had experienced at the entry point of the city. 'I am an employee of the government of the Company'.

(NK) 'Very well.'

'Then janaab must also have studied English?', somebody else asked.

(GND) 'Yes sir, I do have some knowledge'.

(Interlocutor) 'Then pray how much? Are you able to read a letter?'

Nilambar smiled, 'Yes, sir.' Now he drew a breath of relief. These were rather good natured and innocent people. There was no need to be in awe of them.

Wasn't it strange though that they existed in the same world in which he lived?

(*Aag ka Darya* 250)<sup>26</sup>

Crucially the question of the English language settles the odds in favour of establishing Gautam Nilambar Dutt's confidence. From being an uninitiated and awkward simpleton figure vis-à-vis the culture of Awadh, he enters a position of patronising comfort by a simple process of association of superiority with the English language. This is but one of the several references to Gautam's anglophilia, his internalisation of ideas of 'native' inferiority, and his inability to believe in the possibility of 'native' capability. These attitudes of his, brought to the fore during his visit to Lucknow, remain in an unresolved tension with his affective association with the people and signs of 'native' capability both within Awadh and the memory of his own study of Sanskrit texts at Banaras.

The years pass, and Vajid Ali Shah's kingdom is annexed by the British, and the now exiled king removes himself and a circle of nobility and followers to Matia Burj in Calcutta, of which Nawab Kamman is part. In the meantime, Gautam Nilambar Dutt has left the employ of the company and becomes a close associate and acolyte of Rammohan Roy, then the editor of a newspaper, and eventually gets ensconced as a prominent member of the new intellectual bourgeoisie of Bengal. The next meeting between the two characters takes place in 1871 in Gautam's house—we are told that he and Nawab Kamman have been meeting for the sake of custom ('*wazadari*') but they have no common topic of conversation 'except for the past. But how long could Nilambar go on dragging the memory of the past. The future was in

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26 All the translations from *Aag ka Darya* in this section are my own.

front of him. Nawab Kamman had only the past' (270).

As this meeting comes to an end, the diametrical fortunes of Nawab Kamman and Gautam Nilambar Dutt are emphasized:

Nawab Sahab kept running his fingers over his stick. This was another era. Another reign. This was 1871. The world had aged. The world of Nawab Kamal Raza. Nilambar Dutt was also the same age as him. But his world was now coming of age. Of a sudden Nawab Kamman felt that in this new world there was no place for him. Sitting in this modern drawing room of the imperial capital, he appeared very ridiculous to himself.

*(Aag ka Darya 271)*

This turns out to be the last meeting between the two, since Nawab Kamman dies the same night. But prior to that the description of the entire evening is marked by a deep sense of foreboding and melancholia. Bound by a strong bond of affect with Nawab Kamman, Gautam Nilambar Dutt is taken over by strong feelings of unease and disquiet when Nawab Kamman leaves for the night.

The night had intensified. After Nawab Kamman had gone, Nilambar for a while kept pacing in the drawing room. He took out a book from a revolving shelf and flipped through its pages. But even that could not hold his attention. He looked all around him. The shelves around him were overflowing with books. Bound volumes of newspapers. Law journals, reports of committees and agreements. Everywhere there were problems and he had found the solution to problems. He had found the solution to problems? Nilambar started

feeling suffocated for breath.

(*Aag ka Darya* 276)

In these passages, the theme of epochal transition is enhanced and underlined through the images of age and youth, so that even though Nawab Kamman and Gautam Nilambar Dutt are the same age, one is depicted in terms of age and weakness while the other's 'world was now coming of age'. Nawab Kamman, leaning on his stick, is imaged as decrepit and old whereas Gautam's restless pacing of the drawing room suggests virile energy. This binary depiction of the old and the new order is comparable with the terms in which Munshi Mubarak Ali on the one hand and Motilal Nehru on the other are portrayed in the passage from Nehru's *Autobiography* analysed in the preceding section of the chapter.

However unlike in the *Autobiography* here there seems to be an absence of memory as providing the comforting site where the death of the (old order) protagonist can be resolved. Instead, Gautam Nilambar Dutt's restless pacing and the gloom that overtakes the atmosphere reflect the subsequent sub-moment in Nehru's moment of arrival narratives, contained in *Discovery*. The nagging doubts and the unresolved questions in Gautam's mind once again suggest the emergence of memory as a site of visitation of ghosts. That the constitutive nature of colonial modernity itself is key to this aspect of memory is elaborated at length in the description of the Victorian drawing room in the first passage, and even more so in the overwhelming presence of the material production of the Western enlightenment around Gautam, those 'law journals, reports of committees and agreements' that cram his bookshelves. However the implicit progressivism and reformist faith informing this culture is rendered questionable by Gautam's doubts: 'Everywhere there were problems and he had found the solution to problems. He had found the solution to problems?' (274).

While at one level reflective of the uncertainty, doubt and division in Nehru's *Discovery*, this placing of radical doubt in the mind of Gautam at another level lies, I suggest, constitutively beyond the dominant narrative of Nehru's text with its investment in 'the monistic progression of real history' (Partha Chatterjee 157). *Aag ka Darya* is thus able to pose questions regarding the colonial modalities that were historically productive of the old-new, tradition-modernity, convention-reform binaries and inform Nehru's progressivist vision. This distinguishes Nehru's text from Hyder's: while the former remains ultimately (and possibly, given its nature, necessarily) bound within the assumptions of the enlightenment narrative, pivotal for the realisation of the 'eventful demarcating moment'<sup>27</sup> in the teleological narrative of the nation, the latter is able to move across those assumptions and occupy a questioning position. In this respect, Hyder's text can be said to be a manifestation of what Aamir Mufti has identified as a 'defining feature of Urdu literary history': 'the resistance it offers to canonization, its tense, agonistic, and *negative* relationship to the nation-state as a frame for the formation of cultures and selves' (244).

In both the mirror sequences through which Hyder charts the change of epoch theme in the wake of the revolt—the 1820s sequence in Lucknow with Gautam's first meeting with Nawab Kamman and the 1870s sequence portraying their last meeting—questions of language, power and modes of knowledge production are raised. In its own performance as a novel, *Aag ka Darya* intertwines historical memory with the memory of literary practices, and the theme of multiplicity is embodied in the literary forms the text evokes. As Kumkum Sangari has pointed out:

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27 Sangari has usefully suggested in her reading of *Aag ka Darya* that 'Nehru's problematic, however, was that of binding a vast tract of event-filled time into a *moment*, a demarcating, eventful, transformative moment into which a modern and independent India would crystallize' (34). This identification of Nehru's problematic appears to be anchored in Partha Chatterjee's concept of 'the moment of arrival'.

*Aag ka Darya* carried multiple generic possibilities that span much of the history of the Indian novel: a researched historical novel, a mutiny novel (an antidote to Raj fantasies), a regional novel in the shahr ashob tradition (lamenting the repeated decline and fall of Awadh), a political 'discussion' novel (which evolved from the dialogues in reformist polemical treatises), a historical romance, an interracial romance (an ironic replay of Anglo-Indian fiction), a courtesan novel, an urban Lucknow-centred 'college' story, a fictionalised female autobiography, a cosmopolitan novel (on emigres and expatriates). (Sangari 22)

In this sense the river, a metaphor for the flow of time, becomes also a metaphor for narrative and the specific treatment of both in *Aag ka Darya* render it contrapuntal to Nehru's texts of self and nation.

### **Amritlal Nagar's *Gadar ke Phool*: The Collator's Quest**

In the centenary year of the rebellion, fifty years after the commemorative events that had generated Savarkar's text, the Hindi writer Amritlal Nagar (1916-1990)<sup>28</sup> embarked upon a creative work variously described as a novel ('*upanyas*'), history and travelogue, titled *Gadar ke Phool*. In his preface to the book Nagar narrates the genesis of the book:

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28Born in Agra, Uttar Pradesh. Amritlal Nagar started off as a journalist, but gradually moved on to be a writer in the Bombay film industry. From December 1953 till May 1956, he also worked as a drama producer for the All India Radio, Lucknow. In Hindi literature, Amritlal Nagar rose to fame with his humorous and satirical sketches. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award 1967 and the Soviet Land Nehru Award 1970 for his novel *Amrit aur Vish (Nectar and Poison)*. Some of his popular novels include *Sat Ghunghat Wala Mukhra*, *Manas Ka Hans*, *Nachyo Bahut Gopal*, *Khanjan Nayan*, *Orchha Ki Nartaki*, *Chakallas*, *Karwat*, *Peerhiyan* and *Gadar Ke Phool*. Children's literature by Amritlal Nagar includes *Bajrangi Pahalwan*, *Bajrangi Naurangi* and *Natkhat Chachi*. He was also conferred with the Padma Bhushan Award by the Government of India ("Amritlal Nagar, Indian Writer". 12 Dec. 2011, <[http://www.indianetzone.com/50/amritlal\\_nagar.htm](http://www.indianetzone.com/50/amritlal_nagar.htm)>).

While collecting historical material for my novel on the revolution of 1857, I felt that without roaming about in the area of my novel, Awadh, and collecting memories and legends related to the rebellion, my fictional story would be left with gaps. In any case people who could narrate the anecdotes or happenings of the revolt are now becoming scarce. In relation to the revolution of 1857, given the paucity of history written from the Indian viewpoint, it is only through popular tales (*'jan-shrutiyaon'*) that the substance of history can be recognised . . . One day I happened to mention this to the information incharge of Uttar Pradesh, bhai Bhagvatisharan Singh. With his cooperation and that of his department, my work became very easy. Bhagvati bhai is my friend—he does not need my official declaration of obligation.

(*Gadar ke Phool* 3)<sup>29</sup>

These lines indicate the curious nature of this text, as well as its complexity of generic and textual claims—while identifying himself first as a fiction writer, Nagar swiftly seems to adopt the position of the preserver and collector of a fast disappearing oral repertoire, and as somebody invested in correcting the (im)balance of history.<sup>30</sup> This location then makes possible his calling upon governmental resources and machinery, as well as contributes to the sense of an authorised undertaking. However,

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29 All the translations from *Gadar ke Phool* cited here are mine.

30 In 1957 the official currency of the idea of setting the historical record right can be seen for instance in Abul Kalam Azad's *Foreword* to Surendra Nath Sen's government sponsored history *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*. Minister for Education at the time, Azad begins: 'It is now almost five years ago that during the annual session of the Indian Historical Records Commission, I drew the attention of its members to the need of writing a new history of great uprising of 1857, generally described as the Sepoy Mutiny' (v). That historical 'objectivity' fails to resolve the crisis of true narratives of 1857 can be gauged from Azad's conclusion of his seventeen-page piece: 'The present book is the result of the work which Dr. Sen has undertaken at the commission of the Government of India. The only directive I issued was that he should write the book from the standpoint of a true historian . . . The responsibility for the selection and interpretation of events is therefore exclusively his. The Government of India are not in any way committed by any expression of his opinions. . . I may not agree with all the statements that he has made but would like to place on record my appreciation of the objectivity with which he has carried out a difficult task' (Sen xx-xxi).



interestingly the terms of the acknowledgement yet again render the arrangement semi-formal, and thus reinforces the diffuse character of the undertaking suggested in the shifting authorial self-identification of fiction writer/archivist in the first part of the passage.

The title of the text '*Gadar ke Phool*' is also explained in these prefatory remarks:

*Hamare desh ke swajanon ki chita ke phool chune jaate hain. Sau varsh baad hi sahi, main bhi ghadar ke phool chunne ki nishtha lekar awadh ki yaatra ka aayojan karne laga.*

In our country we collect the ashes of the deceased. Albeit a hundred years after the event, I also started preparing for travel to Awadh to collect the ashes of the revolt. (*Gadar ke Phool* 3)

The image of the ritual appeasement of the spirits of bygone generations is then continued in the epigraph on the next page, where the textual undertaking is compared to a '*shraadh ayojan*'.<sup>31</sup> This trope introduces a critical ambivalence of informing purposes—even as Nagar ostensibly sets out to fill gaps in the historical narrative, the key metaphor of the '*shradh*' does not support the idea of historical substantiation, but rather establishes the subject(s) of the past as ghostly, and amenable to ritual respect and homage. At any rate the first few pages of the text lay claim to a two-pronged objective: the recovery of folk narratives and a revisiting of the events of 1857.

In the rest of this section I will analyse the extent to which either of these aims are realised in the text. As far as the recovery of folk narratives is concerned, this is

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<sup>31</sup> The '*shraadh*' refers to the fortnight when the spirits of ancestors are supposed to approach their descendants, calling for due ritual offerings and obsequence. The term can also refer to the actual ritual process, hence '*shraadh aayojan*' means 'the organisation of a *shraadh*'.

the organising motive for the author's physical travel across various districts of Awadh and the considerable governmental support he gets in his exertions. Yet, even though he appears to be in search of oral narratives, his starting points of authority as well as often his final criteria of ratification are written and published sources. For instance the first authorities referred to in the initial lines of the text include the diary of William Russell, Sir Hope Grant's memoir of the Sepoy War, R.C. Majumdar's history, and documents and letters provided by S.A.A. Rizvi. At several points, then, the veracity of an account is held to be confirmed only if it is corroborated by an English source, for instance the *alha* of Balbhadra Singh is considered acceptable as two English accounts mention his resistance (6), a procedure that severely curtails the motive of an alternative or unwritten history. Even more constricting is the pervasive informing tone and modality of the author/researcher/collator towards his intended subject matter. The first couple of chapters establish his interlocutors as somewhat high on hyperbole and claims of local glory: stock comic descriptions of the braggart villager abound in these sections, while the stance of the author/collector is that of patronising and politic acceptance. For instance when one of his interlocutors seems about to get offended at Nagar's apparent lack of belief in his account, Nagar reassures him with the following words: 'I assured him that I had for the time being established belief in his narrative' ('Maine unhen ashwasan diya ki apki baat par hi philhal maine apna vishwas sthaapit kiya hai',<sup>12</sup>)— 'for the time being' ('philhaal') signalling a provisional acceptance and rendering the assurance a politic and patronising act.

In the project of accessing and making accessible the narratives of the provincial populace, Nagar sets himself the task of translating and interpreting in logical and rational terms the elements of faith and religious belief in their accounts.

After recounting a detailed family account of Raja Bali resisting the might of the English and in his hour of trial being aided by the mother goddess, the authorial comment follows:

The way in which crushed pride rises by placing blind faith in gods and goddesses—this is a beautiful instance of that. Even if the rajas were defeated by the English, the beloved gods and goddesses of the rajas gave a taste of their strength to the English. In a revolution that arises with the cry of religion, making up such tales is neither unnatural nor difficult.

(*Gadar ke Phool* 18)

As Dipesh Chakrabarty has suggested<sup>32</sup> this constitutes a 'strong opposition between the rational and the affective, or between reason and emotion, characteristic of our colonial hyper-rationalism [that] has generally afflicted Indian Marxist historians' attempt to understand the place of the "religious" in Indian public and political life' ("Radical Histories" 756).

In these sections of the book, the rendition of the locals' talk in rustic Awadhi, always already coloured by a touch of the comic, and the framing of these speeches by the judicious and sanitised *Khari Boli* of the narrator also adds to this impact of distancing as the dialect is not included in a mode of incorporation or understanding, but rather in a patronising, indulgent and estranged vein.<sup>33</sup> In all, Nagar appears to

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32 In this article "Radical Histories and Question of Enlightenment Rationalism", Chakrabarty argues for the need of 'history as democratic dialogue with subaltern' (756).

33 For the 'national' political implications of *Khari Boli*, and its excluding effects in determining what counts as valid public discourse, see Francesca Orsini: 'Choices in matters of language mirror attitudes to the political sphere. 'Pure Hindi' mirrored, and brought into use every time it was used, an (ideal) community of serious, equal, educated and public-minded Indian citizens. . . . Anything which appeared particular or heterogeneous was, as a consequence, not part of the 'public'. This of course does not mean that it disappeared: only that it did not become part of the public self-definition of what is 'Indian'. . . . Hindi could be implicitly exclusive, both of Indo-Persian culture

have little serious interest in the narratives of the locals: they appear as mere interludes of varying lengths parenthetical to the author's own travels. At the same time, they appear to be glossed over by the exigencies of a state sponsored, time-bound project in the centenary year of the rebellion. Through a combination of the enlightenment rationalist mode that binds Nagar's approach to the folk, his patronising and dismissive attitude towards his interlocutors infused with the city person's ridicule of the *mofussil*, his default dependence on published authorities, and the differential employment of dialect and standard Hindi in the text, the idea of the folk figures as destined to fail, rendering the retrieval and collation motive critically vacuous.

In the early chapters, Nagar's text includes significant extended discourses on tradition and modernity as conflictual entities. For instance:

I started thinking the olden days were so strange and ugly. Usually people get steeped in the feeling of glory the moment they start talking about past ages. I have been hearing it from childhood, elderly people used to talk about how their times were such and such, and the present age is nothing in comparison, that the present is sheer *kalyug*. . . . Those who adopt rites and traditions in toto, and follow the ways of their childhood and youth without reflection, find it very difficult to accept new principles from the heart. . . . They accept the simple state of society as the final truth. That is why they bewail aloud the passing of the days of their youth and childhood.

(*Gadar ke Phool* 15)

In this passage, extending over the better part of a page, Nagar employs the trope of

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and, in a largely illiterate region, of uneducated speakers who had not mastered 'pure Hindi' (*The Hindi Public Sphere* 12-13).

personal progressive growth to produce a teleological account of tradition and modernity. His overt investment in modernity and concomitant distancing from the notion of the past is also clearly evident in formulations such as 'the olden days were so strange and ugly' (*'pichla samay bhi kitna ajeeb aur bhadda sa tha'*), culminating in an especial disdain for nostalgia and rejection of the idea of mourning the lost past: 'they bewail aloud the passing of the days of their youth and childhood' (*'apne bachpan aur guzri jawaani ke dinon ko we zor zor se gohrate hain'*). Ruins among the sites he visits are contained within their rightful and single instructive function in this progressive vision:

Chatta Mahal had turned into a field. Katra Mohirran was a desolate neighbourhood. Till ten years ago looking at such desolated places I would often have visions of ghosts. Now all this does not happen. Settlements keep getting destroyed and getting made. Generations of our ancestors faced the pain of destruction and constructed new habitations. Certainly they could have, due to their pain, hated their enemies. Whoever might have been their enemy, English, Mughal, Pathan, Hun or Kushan, our enemy is aggression. Civilisation rejects an atmosphere which generates aggressive and uncultured behaviour. This is the lesson I take from ruins and their stories.

(*Gadar ke Phool* 11)

Mapped through the idiom of his personal progressive consciousness ('ten years ago' and 'now'), this vision of modernity lays to rest the prospect of ghosts/the past (*'bhoot'*) by containing it within its instrumentalist function as a controlled pedagogical tool ('the lesson I take from ruins').

Specifically, the rebellion is also placed and contained within this overarching

narrative of Indian modernity:

After 1857 the entire country suddenly became like new, and then each day also just brought development in the same direction. Thanks to the English language, it found its independence more than it lost it. It gained its philosophical, cultural and literary glory anew. It was successful in dealing with and removing numerous types of ills in its society. In 1857 actually what lost was our own various kinds of weaknesses. After the revolt, Indian youth started getting equipped to destroy those weaknesses.

. . . . Uselessly sighing about the past times appears like a very stupid and unmanly activity to me. (*Gadar ke Phool* 15)

In this narrative, the rebellion figures as the dregs of an older order, while the post-revolt consolidation of colonial modernity (focussed around the benefits of the English language) is truly revolutionary and is expressed through images of dramatic positive change ('the entire country suddenly became like new'), heralding an entry into an uncomplicated, unflagging, continuous teleological narrative of progress and development ('each day also just brought development in the same direction'). Interestingly, while the passage quoted above begins with the country as the dramatic protagonist ('the entire country suddenly became like new'), as it proceeds the youth of India become the instrumental forces bearing the momentum of modernity. The next paragraph again returns briefly to the dismissed alternative of lamenting the lost past, and consolidates the terms of its dismissal, with the reference to '*namardi*' (unmanliness) generating an implicit textual contrast with the virile and energetic image of Indian youth evoked as essential to the narrative of progress in the previous paragraph.

So far as the explicit objective of revisiting the events of 1857 is concerned, a careful reading of Nagar's text reveals a complicated narrative. A key and exemplary chapter in this regard is one in which Nagar arrives at Faizabad in the course of his research (entitled 'Faizabad', 48-68). Insofar as the formal motive force of the text is the search for authentic local accounts of the rebellion, it is marked by the repeated expression of the difficulty of finding such sources, amounting almost to a perpetual attitude of complaint on the part of the author/narrator. However, a close reading of the text reveals a conjunction of a predisposition to discredit oral narratives, a desire to contain the revolt as the last signpost of a regressive feudal order prior to entry into the progressive narrative of Indian modernity, and the lack of a substantive interest in narratives of 1857. The description of Ayodhya/Faizabad for instance accentuates the divide between the proclaimed intention of seeking narratives of the rebellion and the actual inclinations of Nagar's search:

In the morning I reached Ayodhya. Ayodhya is now a place of historical ruins. Most of today's religious buildings are built on ruins. Seeing Ram's Ayodhya in such a devastated state made me very upset for a few moments. The ancient glory of Ayodhya is to be found in Valmiki's Ramayana in such a way . . .

*(Gadar ke Phool 49)*

The next page then is spent entirely on a long passage from Valmiki's Ramayana describing Ayodhya in hyperbolic, idealised and golden age terms, followed by similar quotations from Kalidasa, the Atharvaveda and other textual sources in the same vein. The narrative then proceeds:

Since the time Babur destroyed the Ram birthplace temple constructed by Vikramaditya, there has been constant strife there. Seeing the strong stance and opposition of the Hindus, Akbar gave permission to establish the image of Ram on a plinth on the ruins of the old temple, near the mosque. But Aurangzeb's intolerance again stoked the fires. . . .

Some years ago a Tamil Brahmin devotee of Ram came to Ayodhya with great reverence. Regarding this travel of his he said that Ayodhya does not look like Bhagwan Ram's city. There are only graves and ruins there. In his own birthplace, Bhagwan Ram lives in straw hut outside the mosque.

*(Gadar ke Phool 50-51)*

This strain of thought and concentration on Ayodhya's pre-Revolt past begins in the early part of the chapter, when Nagar declares his especial interest in finding out more about the Hindu-Muslim riots in Ayodhya in 1853, four years prior to the revolt. As the narrative about the golden age of Ayodhya unfolds it is juxtaposed with repeated expressions of authorial sadness at the town having become a town of graves and ruins, one in which the rightful god Ram was historically condemned, through Mughal depredations, to a marginal existence.

These extensive passages in this chapter then clearly bring out the following points. Firstly, that despite his repeated complaints of his inability to find stories of the rebellion, Nagar does not in any substantive sense appear to be concerned with the spirits that he technically sets out to honour: rather the ghosts that he encounters are of another order, and in the narrative that is then generated the moment of trauma is pre-1857, and the spectres that need negotiation are those of 'Muslim' rule. Secondly,



these passages reveal a fissured 'modernity': despite Nagar's defining tendency to interpret in anthropological terms and contain in his own 'rational' narrative other people's faiths and lived religion, particularly those of the local people he interviews, at a critical juncture he displays his own susceptibility to religious tradition and sentiment and an unquestioning acceptance of canonical Hindu texts as history. Thirdly, the progressive narrative in which he had taken pains in previous chapters to dismiss the mourning of the past and the production of affect from ruins, appears to collapse here in a strong sense of upset and loss. In effect then, what appears as a 'progressive' narrative regarding 1857 becomes backward looking in the case of 'Hindu' India. Hence, even as Nagar's progressive narrative wrestles with and contains the spectres of 1857, it ruptures and gives in to melancholia about ancient India. 1857, in this context is sanctified as an incidental inaugural moment of Indian modernity—even the British are quite incidental to the rebellion, in Nagar's account. The failure of the rebellion is sought to be presented as a historically necessary reflection of weaknesses inherent in Indian society preceding the revolt. Therefore the notions of a 'golden age' and subsequent critical conflicts get projected onto other times and onto an inter-community context, respectively. Francesca Orsini has identified this discursive phenomenon in the context of the Hindi literature of the early twentieth century:

Finally, historical judgement of the Muslim period was directly linked, in English as in Indian historiography, with that of British rule. Here the question was: were we 'freed' by the British? At stake here were the notion of British superiority and the assessment of contemporary times. Yes, British conquest was a liberation, wrote Maithlisharan Gupta, following British historians like Vincent Smith in maintaining that India had been saved from a state of chaos

after Aurangzeb's death.

(Orsini 189)

More recently, Sumit Sarkar has analysed the specific relation of some dominant trends in Indian historiography with the embracement of modernity:

Down to the 1950s, there would have been a considerable degree of overlap—rhetorical flourishes and extreme statements apart—between the assumptions of a Savarkar or a Gowalkar and much professional history-writing. Affinities would be even more evident with a widespread 'historical' commonsense embodied in, and largely moulded by, a very considerable volume of literature from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The tripartite division of Indian history into ancient/Hindu, medieval/Muslim, and modern/ British periods, first made by James Mill, quickly became standard.

. . . Perhaps there could have been a subconscious search for an alibi. If British rule had been preceded by an equally alien and more oppressive domination, that might justify the general acceptance of colonial rule by the new, predominantly Hindu, intelligentsia for much of the nineteenth century, particularly in regions like Bengal which had remained demonstratively loyal during the anti-British upsurge of 1857. The same intelligentsia was eagerly learning a language of patriotism from contemporary Western culture, and its projection back into the past could constitute a safer, 'surrogate' form of nationalism.

*(Beyond Nationalist Frames 252-253)*

Finally, in a telling moment of irony, even the perpetual impression of a paucity of narratives of 1857 is ruptured. Describing an episode during his tour through Daryabad, Nagar writes:

In this gathering for tea there was the benefit that I found a new crowd of people to tell me stories of the revolt. Rai Abhiram Bali of Daryabad, Ajab Singh the zamindar of Sikrori and his fellow Allah Bakhsh, all these were among the braves of 1857. Allah Baksh was killed fighting on Barin Bagh Road, beyond Kayampur . . .

(*Gadar ke Phool* 17)

This is followed by about ten lines of brief and cursory references to some of the accounts, and then gives way to the following exclamation:

With so much to write I would start wishing that my hand would become a machine. There was so much material that I would not be able to pick it up.

*Likhte likhte meri icha hoti hai ki haath machine ho jaye. Samagri itni thi ki mein utha nahin pata tha.*

(*Gadar ke Phool* 17)

This admission points in a threefold direction. Firstly, it clearly swings from the complaint of a paucity of material to that of an excess of the same, the latter not only undercutting the former but also suggesting how everything— from the 'too little' to the 'too much'— is grist for the mill of Nagar's 'difficulties' of collation. Secondly, it presents in a moment of unintended irony the author/researcher figure as an earnest scribe who falls dramatically short of the task at hand, especially as this moment of the revelation of voluminous narratives is accompanied by a mere ten lines of actual references to the narratives. Thirdly, the wishful solution that Nagar produces that his hand may turn into a machine appears to demonstrate the informing problem of his project: his being overwhelmed by bulk shows his positivistic investment in notions of quantity and of the empirical, simultaneously exemplifying and side-stepping the issue

that the challenge at hand may be substantive (in terms of the challenges of both negotiating the folk, and regarding a historical vision adequate to the project at hand) rather than quantitative. The curious expression of exhaustion in the sentences quoted above thus functions as a significant reflection of the failure of the two stated objectives of the project: the recovery of folk narratives and a revisiting of the events of 1857. The project of remembrance and retrieval in *Gadar ke Phool* gets undermined by a patently fissured investment in the narrative of progress and modernity, eventually materialising as a constricted and literalised realisation of the ritual implications of the title.<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has analysed a selection of writings from the first sixty years of the twentieth century, beginning with the landmark appropriation of the British mutiny narrative by V.D. Savarkar in his *Indian War of Independence*. Appearing in the wake of the fiftieth anniversary of the revolt, it figures as the first significant articulation of the need for a wresting or recovery of an Indian narrative of the revolt, an idea that reverberates in national culture through the rest of the century and beyond. At the other end of this temporal spectrum I have looked at Amritlal Nagar's centenary year narrative of recovery of oral traditions as a means to write the still elusive authentic history. A close study of these narratives, both direct textual projects of recovery of an alternative Indian narrative located at commemorative moments, instead reveals their proximity to hegemonic official narratives. Invoking the trope of lost generations, these narratives showcase the tension between the written history of the revolt as constitutively ad-hoc, and the 'real' history as absent, spectral or elusive. The trope of 'past generations' signifying tradition in opposition to modernity is in fact common to

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<sup>34</sup> For a distinctly different approach to the retrieval of the folk element in narrating 1857 within Hindi literature see Vrindavanlal Varma's novel *Jhansi ki Rani Lakshmibai* (1946). Also treated in Orsini 215-224.

all the texts discussed here, other than Gandhi's. Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* not only famously rejects History as a metadiscursive practice, his restricted and almost imperceptible referencing of 1857 is, I argue, an effect of the deep imprint and metamorphosis of colonial discourse and the centrality of the revolt therein.

In my reading of the texts by Nehru, Qurratulain Hyder and Amritlal Nagar I have traced the figuration of 1857 as a threshold marking the passage into modernity, though treated differently in each case. Nehru's narrative, arguably a dominant paradigm for subsequent liberal discourse on 1857 in India, shows a conflict regarding memory as a locus of the smooth containment of 'traditional' tales of 1857, and memory of 1857 as the site of unresolved political issues, including in this instance the unresolved status of Savarkar's book in the national imagination. Hyder's narrative, though focussed on the idea of epochal change stands in a questioning relation to the Enlightenment narrative of national 'arrival' that informs Nehru's works. In the meantime, Nagar's text in its celebratory investment in the enabling qualities of colonial modernity and its historiographical assumptions, exemplifies a self-tripping enterprise of 'recovery'.

## CHAPTER FOUR: REMEMBERING IN EXILE

### Introduction

In this chapter I will attempt a reading of three postcolonial texts and their invocation of 1857. These include the Urdu writer Intizar Husain's novel *Basti* (1979), Qurratulain Hyder's English 'transcreation' of her landmark Urdu novel *Aag ka Darya* as *River of Fire* (1998) and Amitav Ghosh's *Glass Palace* (2000). The theme of exile in my readings is configured in an intricate matrix of historical fact in the wake of the revolt, broader theoretical understandings of modernity and displacement, and as an ethical-critical position of response. Images of exile and displacement dominate narratives of 1857, and the latter are marked by exiled or geographically lost figures, such as Bahadur Shah Zafar, the figurehead of the rebellion, and other leaders such as Hazrat Mahal and Nana Sahib. These exiles are then configured in this chapter in the context of an Adornian understanding of exile as a historically produced condition of unsettledness emergent from the processes of modernity, as well as more particularly from Aamir Mufti's reading of exile as an effect of phenomena of nationalisation on the Indian subcontinent. The readings here also repeatedly refer to the Saidian ideas of the exilic as disruptive of the normative, particularly of dominant national cultures, and of the contrapuntal as a critical position emergent from the exilic. This provides an entry point into a reading of Intizar Husain's *Basti* as a narration of the exclusions of Pakistani cultural memory, complemented by Qurratulain Hyder's *River of Fire* as a critique of the processes of cultural forgetting in the dominant national culture of India. I suggest here that the re-writing of *Aag ka Darya* as *River of Fire* enables and sharpens this process of critique, upholding the idea that 'at its most expansive,

contrapuntality is an argument about the nature of culture in the modern era' (Mufti, "Global Comparativism" 115). Amitav Ghosh conducts a similar argument about the nature of culture in *The Glass Palace*, which like *River of Fire* raises essential questions about the limits placed by the constitutive conditions of liberal knowledge, and queries the latter through a foregrounding of submerged and 'subaltern' narratives of 1857.

### **Intizar Husain's *Basti*: The Forest of Memories**

The novel *Basti* (lit. 'settlement', 1979) by Intizar Husain (1923-) is set primarily in an unnamed city strongly suggestive of Lahore, in the context of the 1971 political disintegration of Pakistan leading to the formation of Bangladesh. The novel however moves back and forth across several critical time frames including the 1965 Indo-Pak war, independence and partition in 1947, the Quit India movement in 1942, the 1919 massacre of Jallianwalla Bagh, and the rebellion of 1857. This historical movement is also accompanied by geographical shifts across various cities of North India/the subcontinent: Delhi, Meerut, Amritsar and Lahore being among the real ones, and 'Rupnagar' and 'Vyaspur' among invented ones. Additionally, these frames of reference are infused with Hindu, Islamic and Buddhist narratives, myth and legend providing expansive circles of signification to history.

The protagonist of *Basti* is named Zakir, a significant detail given the memorative concerns of the novel. Platts' dictionary defines '*zakir*' as 'remembering; grateful;— rememberer; a grateful person; one who praises God' (Platts 576), and '*ziki*' as 'remembering, remembrance; memory; commemoration;—mention, telling,

relating, relation, recital, report, account; praise' (Platts 577),<sup>1</sup> and thus the implications of the name closely combine the practices of remembrance and narration.<sup>2</sup> Zakir is the fulcrum of the narrative and alternates seamlessly between his functions as the first-person narrator and a third-person protagonist. Zakir's position as 'rememberer' is constituted within two different frames, and the intersecting and conflictual relation between these provides the overarching concern of the novel. Zakir as a lecturer in History figures in his first role as 'rememberer': this academic inhabiting of the discipline of modern, institutionalised remembering is his profession, one that is frequently disrupted by the political turmoil surrounding the 1971 break up of Pakistan, and is also unfulfilling and sterile for Zakir—'How boring it is, teaching history to boys' (83). His second role as rememberer is constituted outside of those formal structures: free-ranging and associative, it generates the alternative framework of memory and the theme of the writerly vocation constitutive of the larger discourse of the novel. This discourse is heralded at the beginning of the novel:

The more the turmoil increases outside, the more I sink into myself. Memories of so many times come to me. Ancient and long-ago stories, lost and scattered thoughts. Memories one after another, entangled in each other, like a forest to walk through. My memories are my forest. So where does the forest begin?

(*Basti* 8)

What's going to happen? When he could see nothing ahead of him, he set off backwards. Again the same long journey through the thicket of memories.

(*Basti* 36)

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<sup>1</sup> Platts, John T. *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English*. London: W.H. Allen, 1884.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Osborne coined the term 'memorative communication', which Marcia K. Hermansen and Bruce B. Lawrence have foregrounded in their analysis of Indo-Persian tazkiras: 'memorative communication accents the role of one who both remembers and uses memory to communicate' (Hermansen and Lawrence 171).



Insofar as the events of 1971 portray a revisitation of the logic of new national formations, the formation of Bangladesh in the novel replays the subcontinental trauma of the divide of 1947, and also undercuts the logic of the prior event by addressing the problematic of religious-identity based nationhood. Fratricide is a continuous and incisive motif in the novel, used to query the nature of community and national identities. The story of the first murder on earth, the Biblical narrative of Cain and Abel forms the leitmotif in this theme. The salutary progressivist narrative of the formation of Pakistan is prised open through a repeated evocation of fratricide, as for instance in this exchange between Zakir and one of the students in his History class.

Today I somehow managed to finish the Mughal period. Teaching history is a bore. And studying history? The boys ask absurd questions. And the mind? A boy stood up: "Sir?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"Sir, among the Mughals, were all the brothers step-brothers?"

"Sit down. Out of this whole history, is that the only question you've found to ask?"

I scolded him and made him sit down. A meaningless question. It's meaningless to distinguish full brothers from step-brothers. *Cain and Abel weren't step-brothers*. In history, and before history. Myths, tales, fables, stories of brothers . . . How boring it is, teaching history to boys. And studying history? Other people's history can be read comfortably, the way a novel can be read. But my own history? I'm on the run from my own history, and catching my breath in the present. Escapist. But the merciless present pushes us back again toward our history.

(*Basti* 83)

Fratricide functions in this context in a markedly distinct way from 'the reassurance of fratricide' that Benedict Anderson has written about in *Imagined Communities* (199). If, as argued by Anderson, the image or implication of fratricide in the national self-imaging of modern France or America elides discomfiting conflicts based on religious, linguistic or ethnic difference, anachronistically foregrounding the common nation as the basis of the image, the image of fratricide here in the context of the partitions of the Indian subcontinent into the nations of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh serves as a modality of critical questioning of the logic of these national formations. Fratricide in *Basti* hence is not a figure of forgetting, but rather one of remembrance.

Typically in the narrative an incidental reference serves as a binding motif and creates a chain of recollections. For instance the probability of curfew being imposed initiates references to curfew experiences across a wide historical span, leading from 1971 to the Jallianwala Bagh incident in 1919, and further back to the rebellion of 1857:

“Has a curfew been imposed?” Abba Jan asked sombrely.

“Not yet.”

“How long can it be before that happens? May God the Most High have mercy on this country.” Abba Jaan sighed.

“Maulana! In Amritsar—now *there* was a curfew! Anyone who once stuck his head out of the window never got a chance to pull it back in again.

. . . .

Abba Jaan listened in silence, smoking his huqqah. Then he cleared his throat and said, “God bless him, my venerable father always told how in '57 there was such a strict curfew that they had to keep even the bodies of the the dead in the house for three days sometimes. They couldn't even get a piece of plain

cloth for a shroud, and they couldn't even get a grave for a burial. They would wrap the body in coarse sacking, and in the dark of night, making sure that no soldier was watching, they would bury the body right there in the lane.”

(*Basti* 70-71)

Thus the rebellion of 1857 is incorporated into a narrative of dovetailed events and references across an expansive historical, mythic and fantastic landscape.<sup>3</sup> The narrative of *Basti* is therefore constitutively conjoined with memory, their essential linkage reflected in the Benjaminian understanding of the imbrication of historical memory with narrative, particularly oral forms:

Memory creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation. In the first place among these is the one practised by the storyteller. It starts the web which all stories form together in the end. One ties on to the next, as the great storytellers, particularly the oriental ones have always readily shown. In each of them there is a Scheherzade who thinks of a fresh story whenever her tale comes to a stop. (Illuminations 97)

The narrative references to 1857 in *Basti*, intertwining history, myth and fantasy reach a crescendo in a striking section towards the end of the novel, titled 'A meeting with Tantiya Topi' in which the narrator/protagonist encounters Tantiya Topi, a hero of 1857:

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<sup>3</sup> See for instance Alok Bhalla's remark to Intizar Husain while conducting an interview: '[Your stories] seek to imaginatively recreate the shape of the entire civilisational history of the subcontinent by finding analogies for your personal memories and for the historical events of the region in the foundational stories of the Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. For example, *the stories of exile acquire a strange resonance* as they weave into their texture accounts of the hijrat of Hassan and Hussain and the wanderings of Hindu sages and Buddhist monks' (Bhalla 210, emphases mine).

Passing through the forest, I ran into Tantiya Topi. In this dense frightening forest he seemed like a lion in a thicket. I respectfully told him how things were in the cities.

“Delhi has already fallen.”

“So what?” He answered carelessly.

“Lucknow too has been overthrown.”

“So what?”

“The Rani of Jhansi has been killed. Jhansi is done for.”

“So what?”

“Now there is no point in fighting. The sensible thing would be to surrender. Furthermore, the rainy season is over. The Narbada has very little water. There's no longer any obstacle in the path of the English army.”

Tantiya Topi looked at me intently. He replied, My friend! Formerly I was fighting to save the throne of India, now I'm fighting to save the soul of India. I've lost that fight, I won't lose this one.” He fell silent. He stared at me, and said, “Are you a Muslim?”

“Praise be to God, I'm a servant of Islam.”

“So I see.”

“What do you mean?”

“Friend, what I mean is obvious. You Muslims are fighting only for the throne. And where are you even fighting? I know what used to happen in the Red Fort of Delhi.”

What used to happen in the Fort of Delhi? Now and formerly. At the hands of brothers—the Mughals' rusty swords. But Prince Firoz Shah—Bakht Khan. In what forest is he? Is he too wandering in the forests of Nepal? (*Basti* 210)

The political crisis of 1971 drives Zakir's consciousness inwards, which then becomes the wellspring of creative self-expression, of the production of his narrative record. Indeed the question of the role of the intellectual at a moment of political crisis forms a running strain in the novel through various coffee house conversations between Zakir and his friends as well as within his own personal consciousness. When the unrest and violence break out, Zakir's comfortable self-referentiality is threatened:

Today there was in fact a lot of trouble. . . . He couldn't decide what to do. He had left the house richly drenched in memories, self-absorbed, detached from the outside world. But in the time he took to arrive here, the outside world had gradually taken on meaning. Now it was no longer possible for him to take advantage of the leisure and solitude to sit at his ease, smoking a cigarette, and lose himself in the world of his memories.

*(Basti 57)*

However, by the end of the novel his calling as a writer appears to crystalise: In the darkness he strained his eyes to see around him. Where am I? Words said where? By whom? Stories told when? My brain is seething like a cooking pot over the fire. Then he thought it would be better if he sat down to write in his diary. After all, I never swore to write in my diary only during wartime! And I certainly ought to record in my diary the events of today. He turned the flame of the lantern up higher, and began to write.

*(Basti 208)*

### ***Basti*: The Forest as Exile**

Intizar Husain's *Basti* thus generates key questions pertaining to national formations on the Indian subcontinent, memory and creativity. A recurring image in the text that brings these concerns together in the novel is that of the forest, which lends itself as a figure for exile. As opposed to the 'Basti' (settlement) of the title, the narrator/protagonist takes refuge in the forest of his memories ("My memories are my forest" (8)), wanders in the "thicket of memories" (36), and eventually has a dramatic encounter with a figure from the rebellion of 1857, Tantiya Topi ("In this dense frightening forest he seemed like a lion in the thicket"). As an image of organicity and entanglement, the forest counters the exclusive neatness of modern national formations, and functions as a contrapuntal locus generating memories of plural and composite cultures.<sup>4</sup> Even as narrative is simultaneously a temporal and formal web in *Basti*, memory queries both linear progressive narratives of nationhood and singular and exclusive national cultures. The pervasive presence of myth and legend, drawn from sources spanning the Old Testament, Hindu legends, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, the Quran, Hadith, creation myths Hindu and Islamic, the Arabian Nights, seasonal folk songs, Buddhist parables and the Hebrew Bible in Zakir's memory/narrative reflects the soft boundaries of a composite existence, the intersecting circles of reference for lived Indo-Islamic experience.<sup>5</sup> Not only is the

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<sup>4</sup> Intizar Husain's 1973 short story on the partition, "The City of Sorrows" [Shehr-e-Afsos] also evokes this complex of 1857, exile and contrapuntality:

The Third Man frowned and answered, 'Yes, it is strange indeed. My grandmother used to narrate stories about the mutiny of 1857. She told me that many people were killed during that uprising. They left their homes and never went back. There was a woman who fought the British valiantly. When her home was destroyed, she left her fragrant city and disappeared into the forests of Nepal. For years, she wandered from forest to forest like the vagabond breeze, and then she vanished.' He paused, took a deep breath and continued, 'Instead of hiding in the cities of torment, it is better for a man to find refuge in some dark and dense forest.' . . . Then he sighed, and said in a voice full of regret, 'Alas, if only my hijrat had been in the forests of Nepal' (44).

<sup>5</sup> On 'Indian Muslim culture' Intizar Husain has remarked:

We've used the term Indian Muslim culture. What a purely Islamic culture would be, I don't

logic of religious community constituting a basis for nationhood undercut, the linear assumptions of historicism are also shaken by the complicated relationship—of attempted escape and compulsory referral—between history and the present: 'I'm on the run from my own history, and catching my breath in the present. Escapist. But the merciless present pushes us back again toward our history' (83). In fact the novel repeatedly returns and refers to prior moments of subcontinental political crisis, predominantly moments pre-dating the formation of Pakistan. Significantly these references arise at a moment when the progressive, historicist narrative of the nation seems to be simultaneously most threatened and most operative as in the formation of Bangladesh, with the breakdown of one nation and the formation of another. The dialectic of 'backward' and 'forward' ('When he could see nothing ahead of him, he set off backwards', 36), of forceful and paradoxical orientations across the historicist/progressivist axis in pivotal passages of *Basti* bear a striking resemblance to Walter Benjamin's famous 'angel of history' as imaged in thesis IX in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (*Illuminations* 249). Caught in the storm called 'progress', the angel is irresistibly blown into a future he cannot see, while facing the past perceived as a pile of wreckages that he can't make whole. The angel's dual relationship with the past is in fact indicated in the very first sentence of the thesis: the angel 'look(s) as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating'. This dual and complex relationship of the angel's relationship with the

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have any idea. It is this Indian Muslim culture of which I am a product and which has shaped the history of which I am a part. The Muslims came to India and formed ties with its soil. Indian Muslim culture is that creative amalgam which came about in response to the intellectual and emotional climate that was there . . . the feel of its seasons . . . these ties with the land. . . . I've already said that Khwaja Nizamuddin Aulia and Amir Khusrau are for me important symbols of this culture. Nizamuddin Aulia said at some point that 'I listen to the "Song of Alast" in the Raga Purbi—this for me is Indian Muslim culture. It was this frame of mind, this attempt to understand the Islamic revelation in terms of our land, this endeavour to merge that revelation with our soil which yielded a unity which later was shaped into what we know as Indian Muslim culture. . . . I believe that there was this on-going cultural process which was brought to a halt in a very unnatural way. . . . So these few reactionary Hindus and reactionary Muslims blocked the way of this culture, ushering in those tragic events which have afflicted us ever since. It seems to me that a fundamental cause of all troubles and miseries which have befallen this Subcontinent and its people is the fact that a few powerful figures were able to halt the development and emergence of this culture' (Memon 398-399).

past finds a reflection in the 'backward' facing historian Zakir, 'when he could see nothing ahead of him'. Like the angel of history, Zakir's position—'on the run from . . . history', and 'push[ed] back into history'—encapsulates the dialectic of forceful progressivist movement away from the past and compelling referral to it. Also comparable to the angel's perception, Zakir's dovetailed narrative piles historical events on to each other, creating the impression of 'one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage'.

The theme of exile operates in multiple, interlinked modes in *Basti*. The 'dislocation' of the forest signifies an exilic condition generically produced by historical processes of nationalisation, as argued for instance by Aamir Mufti in his *Enlightenment in the Colony*:

Nationalism has historically been a great *disrupter* of social and cultural relations . . . its reconstitution of societies and populations in terms of distinct narratives of collective life always implies setting forth an entire dynamic of inclusion and exclusion within the very social formation that it claims as uniquely its own and with which it declares itself identical. Thus the great "accomplishment," we might say, of nationalism as a distinctly modern form of political and cultural identity is not that it is a great settling of peoples-- "*this* place for *this* people." Rather, its distinguishing mark historically has been precisely that it makes large numbers of people eminently unsettled. More simply put, whenever a population is *minoritised*—a process inherent in the nationalisation of peoples and cultural practices—it is also rendered potentially *movable*. Minority, in the sense in which I use this term, is always potentially exile, and exile is an actualisation of the threat inherent to the condition of minority. (Mufti, *Enlightenment* 13)



However exile in its secondary sense, as suggested by Theodor Adorno and Edward Said, is not simply a historically produced condition of unsettledness emergent from modernity, but is ultimately an ethical-critical imperative, 'an *alternative* to the mass institutions that dominate modern life' (Said, *Reflections* 184). The task of the intellectual 'with regard to the consensus on group or national identity . . . [is] to show how the group is not a natural or god-given entity but is a constructed, manufactured, even in some cases invented object' (Said, *Representations* 25). The space of the 'forest' in *Basti* provides for Zakir the alternative to the dogmas and exclusions of nationhood, and as an organic site for cultural memory stands for a pre-modern corpus which has been the casualty of modernity.<sup>6</sup> 'Encountering' 1857 in this context assumes the function not only of registering cultural rupture symptomatic of colonial modernity and processes of nationalisation, but also constitutes a critical gesture in the direction of cultural wholeness.

The forest thus eventually emerges as the source of creativity for Zakir, as the imaginative resources for narrative are demonstrated to lie in the plural locations of Indo-Islamic culture in resistance to the cultural amnesia occasioned by partition and concomitant national formations. Further, the writerly vocation for Zakir is also an expression of exile. At one level it functions as a surrogate homeland as visualized by Adorno: 'For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live' (*Minima Moralia* 87). At another writing functions as an expression of the critical significance of the exilic positioning of the intellectual, as the inward self-referential tendency of Zakir's remembrances expands into a cultural testimony. As Said has suggested: 'There is no such thing as a private intellectual, since the moment you set

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<sup>6</sup> I draw here from Aamir Mufti's observation: 'The premodern corpus can only be approached from a position of *exile* from it, that is, through a careful elaboration of the forms of displacement, distance, alienation—and, yes, remembrance, familiarity, and recognition—that characterise our relationship to it' (*Enlightenment* 19).

down words and then publish them you have entered the public world. . . . There is always the personal inflection and private sensibility, and those give meaning to what is being said or written' (*Representations* 9). In the narrative grammar of *Basti*, this striding of the personal and public is played out through the frequent switch between the first person 'I' and the third person 'he' by Zakir.

### **Qurratulain Hyder's *River of Fire* (1998): 'An Argument About the Nature of Culture'**

In 1998 Qurratulain Hyder published an English 'transcreation' of her 1959 novel, *Aag ka Darya, River of Fire*. Within a decade of its first publication the Urdu novel had been translated into fourteen Indian languages (Sangari 21), though it took a further thirty-nine years for the English translation to be produced, the 'delay' occasioned perhaps at least partly by Hyder's insistence on self-translation into English. Hyder's thoughts on the process of her self-translation into English are significant in this context:

A translator has to be faithful to the text, and she doesn't have the freedom to make changes as it is somebody else's text. I being the writer, can do so. I do not merely translate, I don't even say that I transcreate. I rewrite, and I rewrite with the English-knowing reading public in mind. (Mukherjee 216)<sup>7</sup>

The details of the rewriting involved in Hyder's *River of Fire* are worth attending to. While *Aag ka Darya* is a 650-page narrative containing a hundred and one chapters,

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Mirza Taqi Ali, 'Rigours of Transation', in *Translation: From Periphery to Centrestage*. Ed. Tutun Mukherjee. New Delhi: Pencraft International, 1998.

*River of Fire* has 428 pages consisting of only seventy-three chapters. *Aag ka Darya* is elaborative, lyrical, and reflective, while *River of Fire* is brisk, spare and condensed. At the same time, *River of Fire* is not simply a pruning of *Aag ka Darya* : as Kumkum Sangari has remarked about the two texts, 'the narrative grid is stable, the embellishments alter: it has a fixed core and a floating text of elaboration' ( Sangari 25). In this section, my attempt is twofold: firstly to query the nature and implications of the floating text of elaboration insofar as it manifests itself in the rewriting of the chapters pertaining to the rebellion of 1857; and drawing from that, to consider translation as a contrapuntal space, which in the given context, I argue constitutes 'contrapuntality [as] an argument about the nature of culture in the modern era' (Mufti, "Global Comparativism" 115). As a critique of dominant national culture in India and its processes of cultural forgetting, *River of Fire* in its Urdu matrices complements Intizar Husain's *Basti* as a contrapuntal text in the context of nation and culture in Pakistan. At the same time, as a fairly recent postcolonial Indian text 'written' in English it bears comparison with a similar contrapuntal potential in certain Indian writings in English, a question I pursue with reference to Amitav Ghosh's *Glass Palace* in the last section of the chapter.

Significantly, Hyder's *River of Fire* despite its overall condensation expands the number of chapters devoted to the British colonial period: rather than the nine chapters in *Aag ka Darya*, in *River of Fire* this period occupies thirteen chapters. Of these a high proportion of seven chapters (22-23 and 24-29) are devoted to the context and aftermath of the rebellion, centred specifically on the deposition and exile of Vajid Ali Shah. Chapter 22, 'A Faery Tale Kingdom', sets the scene for the visit of Gautam Nilambar Dutt to Lucknow by narrating the background to the development of "Oudh" (Awadh) under the nawabs based on combining 'the finest elements of the

civilisations of Iran and India' (131). In March 1823 Gautam Nilambar Dutt, an Anglophile clerk at the East India Company, arrives in Lucknow on an official errand to the Residency. During his visit, narrated in this and the following chapter ('Farewell to Camelot') Gautam attends the soiree of the courtesan Champa Jan, where he also meets Nawab Abul Mansoor Kamaluddin (Nawab Kamman). After an extended period of interactions with the people of Awadh, particularly the beautiful and intelligent Champa Jan, Gautam feels 'sorry that he was leaving Awadh' (144). Chapter 25, 'The Waterway of Tears' narrates the deposition of Vajid Ali Shah, followed by the delegation to London led by Malika Kishwar and the outbreak of the rebellion in 1857 led by Hazrat Mahal in Lucknow.

Chapter 26, 'The Queen and her Knights', shifts to 1868 Calcutta, and depicts a chance meeting after nearly forty-five years between Gautam Nilambar Dutt, 'among the eminent bhadralok of Calcutta' (170), 'a prosperous printer and publisher' (174) and 'well known social reformer' (181) and Nawab Kamman, now living in the exilic colony of Matia Burj near Calcutta, the location of the deposed Vajid Ali Shah. While in *Aag ka Darya*, they had kept meeting for the sake of custom ('*wazadari*') over the years, the recasting of this meeting in *River of Fire* as a chance encounter after decades occasions a synoptic and retrospective narration of the impact and aftermath of the revolt by Nawab Kamman to Gautam Nilambar Dutt. This and the following chapter contain an extended conversation between Gautam and Nawab Kamman, generating an expansive narrative that moves back and forth between the period of the rebellion and other prior moments in Awadh, constituted of the reminiscing narrative of Nawab Kamman, the responses and reactions of Gautam Narayan Dutt, and the third person narratorial/authorial voice.

The broad contours and pattern of the extensive conversation are as follows. Nawab Kamman's description of the battle arrangements of Hazrat Mahal: 'she and her military advisors held their meetings at the House of Virgins' (158), leads to an explanation of the House of Virgins, an institution that went back to the time of King Nasiruddin Hyder (1827-1837). This in turn leads to a brief description and assessment of Nasiruddin Hyder by Nawab Kamman:

“This king died young. He has been defamed as a sod and an imbecile, but he set up a modern observatory and hospital, an English school and a printing press, and he sailed a steam boat in the Gomti.”

The Bengali gentleman stroked his grey moustache in amazement.

“Begum Hazrat Mahal also used this inaccessible place for her cabinet sessions.”

“Well there are more things in heaven and earth than. . .” the learned Babu murmured. (*River of Fire* 158)

Nawab Kamman gives a chronological account of the Mutiny, infused at the same time with a free ranging, anecdotal recontouring that includes stories of the welcome accorded to Nana Sahib by Hazrat Mahal in Lucknow, the personality of Hazrat Mahal as leader of the rebellion, and references to Lakshmibai of Jhansi. Nawab Kamman's narrative then proceeds to Hazrat Mahal's exodus when defeat becomes inevitable, followed by an account of her counter proclamation:

“The Begum did not accept defeat. Queen Victoria's famous Proclamation was published on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, 1858. Our own Queen issued a counter-

proclamation in which she logically challenged the British Empress' statements point by point.” *(River of Fire 162)*

A page summarising the contents of the proclamation finally culminates in the following passage:

“Queen Victoria's Proclamation says that the Christian religion alone is true. What has the administration of justice got to do with the truth or falsehood of a religion? asked the Begum. She ended her Firman adding that the English promised no better employment for Hindustanis than making roads and digging canals. If people cannot see clearly what this means, there is no help for them.”

Gautam was astounded. He had never heard of this counter proclamation. *(River of Fire 163)*

From the anecdotal relation of the personalities and acts of the Indian leaders of the rebellion, Nawab Kamman's narrative proceeds into a sorrowful account of personally witnessed retributive punishment meted at large. In the next chapter, 'Bakht Khan, Lord Governor-General', Nawab Kamman describes his return from Europe (where he had followed Malika Kishwar's delegation) to find the post-revolt Lucknow a city of ruins:

“Now, wherever I see an ancient banyan and its beards, I avert my eyes. They remind me of corpses dangling from roadside trees. When I came back to India the hanging mela was in full swing. Twenty-seven thousand Muslims were hanged in Delhi. Thousands of Hindus and Muslims were sent to the gallows

in Cawnpore, Allahabad and other places. In Lucknow they installed the gallows in a row on a roadside. Forty to fifty persons per day was usual for the hangmen, and the corpses were kept dangling till the next batch was brought. Many were executed on the mere suspicion of being rebels and lots of distinguished men were tied to cannons and blown up.”

“They hanged a few old women, too, for good measure and a young courtesan, Azizan Bai, who had fought as a soldier in Cawnpore. Urdu poet Imam Bakhsh Sehbai and his sons were shot. Maj. Hodson even presented two Mughal princes' severed heads on a platter to the old King,” the nawab's voice quivered.

*(River of Fire 167)*

The next passages then move on to depict Gautam's thoughts, his subjectivity functioning as bearer of the impress of the discourse of the dominant colonial order:

Gautam was well acquainted with the version of the Mutiny which the English press of India had published. The Siege of the Lucknow Residency had already become a literary legend in England and Anglo-India. The heroism of British generals and soldiers, the bravery of European students of Lucknow's La Martiniere College, the massacre of English families all over north India, the treacherous drowning of boats carrying English women and children in the Ganges off Cawnpore—all of which was true, too.

In the crowded reading rooms of Calcutta's public libraries Gautam had gone through the English ladies' diaries published in the magazines of London during '57-58. Bookshelves were full of novels, poems and general reminiscences coming out from England. In the smoking rooms of exclusive clubs, in drawing rooms of the Civil Lines across the country, in the mess bars

in cantonments, civilians and war veterans narrated their horrible experiences. They talked of the loyalty and bravery of their native subordinates, domestic servants and sepoys, and the brutality of the rebels. After Hyder Ali and Tipu, Tantiya Tope, Kunwar Singh and Danka Shah were the new bogeymen in the nurseries of Anglo-India. (*River of Fire* 167)

The historical-political nature of the sites of literary production in the aftermath of revolt is further explored in the rest of the chapter, where the narratorial voice produces accounts of the Urdu press and provides quotations from Urdu newspapers from the period of the rebellion. The story of the killing by a firing squad, of Maulvi Mohammad Baqar, editor of the *Delhi Urdu Akhbar*, becomes a potent configuration of the resistance of the press, the complex nature of interpersonal relationships across the race divide, as well as the emergence of a new literary history as Baqar's son Mohammad Hussain Azad 'lived to become the author of the famous history of Urdu literature entitled *Aab-e-Hayat, The Waters of Life*' (170). The narrative continues:

Lord Canning, the first viceroy of British India, told his council that the indigenous press had been inciting the people to mutiny before 1857. Heavy censorship was imposed on the vernacular papers, but some poignant poems lamenting the destruction of Delhi and Lucknow were published in Urdu. The erstwhile Mughal capital was now called *Dehli-i-marhoom*, the late lamented Delhi. The two deposed kings, Bahadur Shah and Vajid Ali Shah, wrote heartrending ghazals and mahavis. Mirza Ghalib wrote of his deep sorrow in his letters to his friends. (*River of Fire* 170)



In what is arguably the most significant passage in these chapters, the narratorial/authorial voice comments :

*How much can one know?* The nawab had quoted Sauda. *How would Gautam know* about the Urdu poets Sauda, Mir, Nazir and Insha and the overtly political poetry they had written after the rise of British power in India? Or Mus-hafī, who had openly said in a couplet: “How cunningly the Firnagis have taken away the glory and wealth of Hindustan!” Who had heard of them in Britain? Lord Byron could sing of the Isles of Greece, stir the West and go off to fight the Terrible Turk. The Greeks were admired for their War of Independence, but 1857 was condemned as the native rebels' mutiny.

(*River of Fire* 167-68, emphases mine)

Hence, the key issues that emerge out of a reading of the elaborated text around the event of the rebellion in *River of Fire* can be summarised as follows. The dialogue between Nawab Kamman and Gautam Narayan Dutt offers not only a synoptic view of the events of 1857 in Awadh and outside, juxtaposing oppositional narratives of the rebellion, but also provides a discursive register of the respective sites and moments of the production of those narratives. Nawab Kamman's free-ranging, anecdotal and extensive recontouring, infusing information with affect contrasts with Gautam's role in the conversation. Gautam is primarily a listener, his subjectivity functioning as a reflector of imperial discourse, and his brief responses mostly consist of expressions of surprise, frequently articulated through Shakespearean tags. Gautam Narayan Dutt's subjectivity alternates in these chapters between an entrenched conviction in the premises of colonial modernity on the one hand, and an affective link with Nawab Kamman leading to the emergence of questions shelved in uncritical embracement of

western enlightenment thought on the other. At the same time, Nawab Kamman's narrative is an instance of memorative communication, 'accent(ing) the role of one who both remembers and uses memory to communicate' (Hermansen and Lawrence 171). Indeed Nawab Kamman's extended explanation to Gautam appears to arise from the desire to speak to the dominant order and to represent and bring to record narratives forgotten by the latter.

At one level, Nawab Kamman's loquacious reminiscing is a modality of redressal of representational imbalance. At the same time it is in its very operative presence a testimony of that imbalance, especially in that the 'dialogue' appears to locate the burden of narration/speech onto the position of the un-narrated: it is significant that Gautam Narayan Dutt's role in the conversation is mostly expressions of surprise and astonishment. This leads to my proposal that a second framework also needs to be employed here, reassessing the relative significance of silence and speech in hegemonic situations. As Robert Fivush has argued in 'Speaking Silence: the social construction of silence in autobiographical and cultural narratives':

Essentially the canonical is the unmarked and therefore does not need to be voiced. If the canonical is expected, there is no need to voice it; it is the given, the invisible background of shared understanding. This conception of silence is the freedom *not to speak*, to be silent, the freedom to assume shared knowledge that comes from a position of power. *The need to speak, to give voice to experience, comes from a need to explain, justify, rationalise, convince, both others and oneself.*

(Fivush 94, emphases mine)

Kumkum Sangari has suggested that in the abridgement of *Aag ka Darya* into *River of Fire*, 'Hyder grasped her conception and its significance with more precision' (26). Equally, it may be said that the additions and elaborations that take place in the latter text, particularly with reference to the 1857 episodes, also contribute to a sharpening of the original vision in those episodes as represented in *Aag ka Darya*. The passages in *Aag ka Darya* focussed on the embeddedness of Gautam Narayan Dutt in Enlightenment culture, and his moments of doubt that leave him questioning the panacean quality of the progressivism and reformism he exemplifies, are retained in *River of Fire* (*Aag ka Darya* 276, *River of Fire* 174-175, 180).<sup>8</sup> Further, in *River of Fire* the issues of oppositional historical views and the unresolved questions of Enlightenment modernity are critically focussed on the embedding of knowledge in historically dominant literary and discursive formations. Quotations from and references to eighteenth and nineteenth century Urdu poetry are thus reflective of the experience of disruption in a dual way: firstly in its objective status as a reflective or representational space (by being the site of the 'depiction' of disruption and voicing of anti-colonial sentiment), and secondly in its epistemic minoritisation as literary culture. The issue of knowledge formations being entrenched in politico-linguistic matrices is elaborated in the English translation with the latter emerging as a space for registering and recording minoritised Urdu literary traditions as well the processes of minoritisation and forgetting. In so far as Gautam Narayan Dutt represents the consolidation of dominant colonial culture, the question raised in the passage last quoted about the possibility of knowledge is one that is asked effectively regarding the nature and implications of epistemic shifts in literary and knowledge formations after the second half of the nineteenth century. As Aamir Mufti points out in *Enlightenment in the Colony*:

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<sup>8</sup> Analysed with reference to *Aag ka Darya* in chapter 3.

The premodern corpus can only be approached from a position of *exile* from it, that is, through a careful elaboration of the forms of displacement, distance, alienation—and, yes, remembrance, familiarity, and recognition—that characterise our contemporary relationship to it. (Mufti 19)

Thus not only are the 1857 chapters in *River of Fire* peopled with exiled characters—Hazrat Mahal in the forests of Nepal, Malika Kishwar in Europe, and Vajid Ali Shah and Nawab Kamman in Matia Burj in Bengal—the English version appears to embrace the contrapuntive potential of 'exile' by generating what Aamir Mufti has called 'an argument about the nature of culture in the modern era' (Mufti, "Global Comparativism" 115).

### **Amitav Ghosh, *The Glass Palace* and the 'Resounding Silence' about 1857**

*Glass Palace* (2000) by Amitav Ghosh is his long historical novel set in Burma, India and Malaya, spanning more than a century from the fall of the Konbaung Dynasty in Mandalay, moving through the Second World War and concluding in the mid-1990s. An expansive exploration of the interlinked economies and politics of these regions, it charts through a plethora of interwoven characters, families and their fortunes the massive movements of individuals and populations across India and Burma, particularly in the wake of British colonial interventions. The first significant political moment of the novel is the fall of the Konbaung Dynasty in 1885. A powerful and expansionist kingdom, it had a late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century history of a long, ill-defined border with British India. Three Anglo-Burmese wars over a six-decade span (1824-1885) eventually led to the complete annexation of

Burma, and the deposition and exile of the reigning King Thebaw and his family to Ratnagiri in Western India. In Ghosh's novel the central protagonist from whom the other characters and the plot radiates is Rajkumar, initially a modest migrant from Bengal to Burma in 1885, later a successful teak merchant. He is linked to both India and Burma through his initial migration, his teak business, and through his love for Dolly Sein, lady-in-waiting to Queen Supalayut, the consort of King Thebaw. In this section I will analyse the presence and significance of 1857 related references in the text, and place them in relation to the contrapuntive locus of 1857 identified in the previous two sections of the chapter, and also as constitutive of the core inquiries of the novel. Prior to that, however I will focus on a correspondence between Amitav Ghosh and Dipesh Chakrabarty that closely followed the publication of the *Glass Palace*.

Shortly after the publication of *Glass Palace*, in December 2000 Amitav Ghosh engaged Dipesh Chakrabarty in an e-mail discussion arising from Ghosh's reading of Chakrabarty's signal work, *Provincialising Europe* (also published in 2000). Ghosh in this correspondence responded to Chakrabarty's book and raised some conceptual questions regarding the relations between empire, race and resistance. First, in the initial letter Ghosh points out a striking silence about 1857 in the context of the coverage of subaltern resistance in *Provincialising Europe* :

There seemed to me to be certain very important areas of silence in *Provincialising Europe* and by the time I got to the end of the book, I felt that these silences had achieved, as it were, a piercing volume. To take one example: one of the most exciting aspects of *Provincialising Europe*, to my mind, is the way you attempt to restore meaning to subaltern resistance, even

where those patterns of resistance make no sense from the point of view of modern citizenship, progress, etc. To this end I was particularly struck by the arguments on pages 103 and 104 (Santal rebellion etc.). Yet, illuminating as these discussions were I was struck also by the absolute silence on the one moment which brings all these issues to a crisis—that is 1857. This absence seems all the more striking because this is surely the one case in which all the patterns you point to can be observed at their clearest. Eighteen fifty-seven is multiply interesting because the reasoning of the insurgents was not entirely opaque to 'reason' as it was in so many other anti-colonial insurgencies. Eighteen fifty-seven is also universally acknowledged to be the single most important anti-colonial uprising in modern history; by the same token it was also possibly the most important event in all of modern Indian history. What is more, real subalterns (in the military sense) played a very important part in this Uprising. Why then is there such a resounding silence on this subject in *Provincializing Europe* (as in so much else that has been written by the Subalterns)? (Ghosh "Correspondence" 147-48) <sup>9</sup>

Elaborating on the theme of race as the unarticulated constant in the configuration of colonialism ['Race was more than just a tool of Empire: it was (in the Kantian sense) one of the foundational categories of thought that made other perceptions possible', 149], Ghosh argues that the idea of tutelage informing the liberal practice of political deferral<sup>10</sup> was necessarily founded on theories of race, and

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<sup>9</sup> In response, Dipesh Chakrabarty explains his choice of using the Santal rebellion as emanating from Ranajit Guha's use of that instance in 'The Prose of Counterinsurgency'. Interestingly, this essay by Guha does treat of 'mutiny narratives' as well, but without reference to the question of the place of supernatural agency in historiography. In any case, this explanation does suggest the proliferation and reinforcement of existing themes in Subaltern Studies scholarship of rebellions.

<sup>10</sup> Ghosh bases his thought largely on Uday Singh Mehta's *Liberalism and Empire* (1999): 'The more common liberal response . . . is to articulate the modalities of governance that exist . . . in the temporising between educating Indians but *not yet* deeming them worthy of autonomy, in the penumbra of crafting responsible government but *not yet* giving Indians self government—in the

that 1857 in this context is a significant political moment on two related grounds—as embodying liberal deferral of the promulgation of self-rule and as marking the consolidation of race as a 'foundational social fact':

On the question of the promulgation of self-rule in 1858: this seems to me to be very clearly a political response to 1857. (One can't help wondering, why promise something for the future, when so many people, have died to make it clear that they want it now?) Equally, what is envisaged here is precisely a kind of perpetual deferment, as later articulated by Mill et al. In this discourse race is the unstated term through which the gradualism of liberalism reconciles itself to the permanence of Empire. Race is the category that accommodates the notion of incorrigibility, hence assuming the failure of all correctional efforts (and thus of tutelage). (Ghosh, "Correspondence" 152)

Race . . . was the foundational social fact of the post-1857 Empire—an idea embedded more in practices than in discourse—and it grew ever stronger from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onward. (Ghosh, "Correspondence" 149)

A central concern of Ghosh here is the nature of Indian (and particularly Bengali bhadralok) silence regarding the anguish of colonial, racial domination:

I often ask myself: why did my father (and in some sense, all our fathers) avoid telling us these stories? There is a clue in your book: 'Bengali men experienced numerous instances of racial prejudice and humiliation.' These stories must have been very hard to tell—especially because they were so

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morally, politically, and rationally justified ambivalence of liberalism for the *time being* remaining imperial' (Mehta 30).

much at odds with their vision of themselves as high-caste, *bhadra* patriarchs. No doubt it was even harder to accommodate the idea that these were not merely 'numerous instances': they represented the system itself. For if they were to accept that, then all the versions of modernity they had built up would crumble.

(Ghosh, "Correspondence" 153)

This constitutes a core question that Ghosh explores here: that of Bengali *bhadralok* silence on questions of subjection as reflective of the need to maintain the precarious versions of colonial modernity that had been painstakingly created by them.

Further, Ghosh in this correspondence emphasizes 1857 as a nodal date in the emergence of what was seen in colonial accounts as Indian 'servility':

You will undoubtedly have noticed that one of the key terms in Victorian discourse on India (especially in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) is '*servility*'. This is a term that intrigues me. You know, and I know, that there is nothing particularly servile in the Indians whom one encounters in our everyday dealings. On the contrary it could well be said that Indians (of all classes) are often very contentious and self-assertive. Similarly it is hard to imagine that an insurrection on the scale of 1857 could have been undertaken by people who had become 'servile'. Nor do we encounter this representation in early Arab (or European) accounts of India. . . . How do we account for this? I think once again 1857 is the key: In the aftermath of this event the great mass of 'Indians did indeed acknowledge that they were a 'defeated people' (Bengalis had probably made this acknowledgement much earlier). I suspect that it was only in the aftermath of 1857 that most north and central Indians acknowledged that



the British regime was not in India on their sufferance as they had once assumed; that there was really truly nothing they could do about it and that resistance, as they had once thought about it, was futile—*the only grounds left for resistance were within the conquerors terms*. I believe that this recognition underlay all their subsequent attempts to appropriate modernity: I think we also have to accept that in their personal everyday behaviour this did indeed often translate into something that could be read as 'servility'.

(Ghosh, "Correspondence" 162, emphasis mine)

Here the 'acknowledgement of defeat' is seen as historically configured in north and central India with 1857, but in the case of Bengal such 'acknowledgement' (and the embracing of precarious modernity) is considered as pre-figurative of the post-1857 order. Relating the question of 'defeat' with survival/resistance 'within the conqueror's terms', Ghosh expands his concerns around the co-optive implications of dwelling in the liberal discourse complicit in Empire, both for preceding generations of colonised men, and for modern Indian scholarly discourse. Hence, there are two crucial issues that Ghosh raises: first, given the absence in Bengali cultural discourse of anguish about the colonial situation, 'refusing to represent [subordination] to oneself' may have amounted to a mode of 'assimilating' it (161). Secondly, he asks whether this silence also manifests itself in 'our historiography, for reasons that are not dissimilar':

The ideology of race is an ugly subject: is it possible that we Indians flinch from it partly in self-preservation, and partly because it so hopelessly contaminates that aspect of liberal western thought in which our own hopes of social betterment (as you are so careful to point out) are often founded? But then don't we have to ask also, at what point does our aversion become either

By asking this critical question of contemporary academic, historical and historiographical activity Ghosh suggests a historically constituted line of continuity between colonial *bhadralok* denial of oppression on the one hand, and the silences of post-colonial, liberal scholarship (extending to and including the work of the Subaltern historians) on the other. These silences as Ghosh points out, appear to intensify and coagulate particularly around the rebellion of 1857. Thus 1857 while at one level is an arch-instance of insurrection in modern India, is at another overlaid by the assumptions of Enlightenment discursivity, in which its status as a moment of mere deferral appears to be constituted in history and gets reinforced historiographically.

### ***The Glass Palace, 1857 and Exile***

As a novel that is not *about* 1857, *The Glass Palace* contains a remarkably high number of references to the rebellion, to the extent that it can be characterised as the submerged leitmotif of this text—it has no less than nine references of varying length and significance through the book. While several of these references have multiple resonances, they can be identified within certain clusters. The first is the figuring of the events of the rebellion of 1857 as a political lesson for the British colonial order. For instance in chapter 4, as King Thebaw, Queen Supalayay and the royal family are being transported from Mandalay, intended to be exiled to Ratnagiri in Western India, this is constituted as a potentially dangerous political moment based on the British experience of 1857:

Several hundred British soldiers fell in beside the ox carts and the girls. They

were heavily armed, prepared for trouble. . . . The people of Mandalay were not expected to sit idly by while their King and Queen were herded into exile.

. . .

The British high command believed this to be potentially the most dangerous moment of the entire operation. Some of them had served in India and an incident from the recent past weighed heavily on their minds. In the final days of the Indian uprising of 1857, Major Hodson had captured Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last of the Mughals, on the outskirts of Delhi. The blind and infirm old emperor had taken refuge in the tomb of his ancestor, Humayun, with two of his sons. When it came time for the major to escort the emperor and his two sons back into the city, people had gathered in large numbers along the roadside. These crowds had grown more and more unruly, increasingly threatening. Finally, to keep the mob under control, the major had ordered the princes' execution. They had been pushed before the crowd and their brains had been blown out in full public view.

These events were no more than twenty-eight years in the past, their memory freshly preserved in the conversation of messes and clubs. It was to be hoped that no such eventuality would present itself now—but if it did it would not find King Thebaw's escort unprepared. (*Glass Palace* 44)

An early and detailed reference in the text, this passage introduces the two depositions and exiles, of Thebaw and of Bahadur Shah Zafar as historically proximate, as well as constituting a symmetric pattern.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This idea of symmetry and similarity in the two depositions is significant for accentuating the point that the specifics of each situation (questions about the nature of the regime, and therefore of the purported need for reform) did not matter in the actual operation of imperial takeover. Ghosh makes this point with specific reference to Burma, in relation to the problematics of indirectly 'conceding the argument that imperialism was, in at least one of its aspects, an enterprise of social reform'. Paraphrasing from an essay by Tilak, Ghosh writes: 'The Burmese had no caste system—they have

At a later political moment in the novel the rebellion is again evoked in its role as forming the substratum of British colonial authority and its extended memory, when in chapter 35 the British troops are stationed in Singapore during the Second World War. Arjun Roy, Second Lieutenant in the 1/1 Jat Light Infantry, has a conversation with the British Lieutenant-Colonel Buckland, in which the latter employs the memory of 1857 to articulate a warning against a possible military mutiny:

'You know, Roy,' Lieutenant-Colonel Buckland said quietly, 'my grandfather lived through the mutiny of 1857. I remember that he bore very little rancour towards the civilians who'd got mixed up in the troubles. But as for the soldiers—the sepoys who'd led the Mutiny—that was another matter altogether. Those men had broken an oath: they were traitors, not rebels, and there is no traitor so contemptible as a soldier who reverses his allegiances. And if such a thing were to happen at a dodgy time, I think you would agree with me, wouldn't you, Roy, that it would be hard to conceive of anything quite so unspeakable?'

(*Glass Palace* 417)

Yet another set of references to 1857 in the novel appear simply as constituting resonances in later action and experience. For instance in chapter 19 portraying 1929 Burma in the context of anti-Indian riots and unrest, street rumours remind Uma of similar pre-1857 phenomena:

A few days later they learnt that there had indeed been a coronation of sorts,

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always been egalitarian; the Burmese were not ignorant—they had complete literacy long before the British came; in Burma there was no sati and no mistreatment of women . . . but this did not prevent the British from occupying and despoiling them. In many ways they treated the Burmese even worse than they did us' ("Correspondence" 157).

not far from Rangoon: a healer by the name of Saya San had had himself crowned King of Burma, with all the traditional observances. He'd gathered together a motley band of soldiers and told them to avenge the capture of King Thebaw. These rumours reminded Uma of the events that preceded the outbreak of the Indian uprising of 1857. Then too, well before the firing of the first shot, signs of trouble had appeared on the north Indian plains. Chapatis—those most unremarkable of everyday foods—had begun to circulate from village to village, as though in warning. No one knew where they had come from or who had put them in motion—but somehow people had known that a great convulsion was on its way. *(Glass Palace 246)*

Also at the beginning of the Second World War, there is news that Indian troops stationed in Malaya had turned mutinous:

At this point the incident assumed a new gravity. For generations, the British Indian army had operated on the principle of maintaining a careful balance between the troops. . . . That Hindu and Muslim troops could act together to support an Indian officer came as a shock to the High Command. No one needed to be reminded that nothing of this sort had happened since the Great Mutiny of 1857. At this point half-measures were dispensed with. A platoon of British soldiers from the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders was sent in to surround the mutinous Indians. *(Glass Palace 319)*

However the most evocative uses of 1857 that the novel makes, concerned as it is with vast movements across the subcontinent, and indeed across continents over a period of a century are focussed on the idea of exile. The primary pattern for this

theme is provided by the symmetrical exiles of Bahadur Shah Zafar (from Delhi to Rangoon), and of King Thebaw (from Mandalay to Ratnagiri), serving as figures for dispossession and loss of sovereignty, for the pervasive patterns of British colonial interventions, and as a site to explore the operation of imperial power. Five days after setting out from Mandalay on his exilic journey, King Thebaw passes by Rangoon on the Irrawaddy and through his binoculars catches a glimpse of a city that was otherwise forbidden to him as it had passed under British control in 1824. The only exceptions to this rule forbidding the royal family from visiting Rangoon were 'rebels and exiles, princes who had fallen out with the ruling powers in Mandalay' (49). The Thonzai Prince, Thebaw's half- brother was one such individual: having quarrelled with the then King, he had sought refuge in the British held city, but 'later the Prince had been forgiven and had returned to Mandalay' (49) thus serving as a source of stories and reports about Rangoon for the curious inhabitants of the palace.

One of the stories the Thonzai prince used to tell was about Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal emperor. After the suppression of the uprising of 1857 the British had exiled the deposed emperor to Rangoon. He'd lived in a small house not far from the Shwe Dagon. One night the Prince had slipped off with a few of his friends and gone to look at the emperor's house. They'd found him sitting on his veranda, fingering his beads. He was blind and very old. The Prince and his friends had meant to approach him but at the last moment they had changed their minds. What could you say to such a man?

*(Glass Palace 49)*

From this particular portrait of the exiled and infirm Mughal king, inserted at the moment of Thebaw's own exilic voyage, the narrative develops an encompassing picture of colonial migration:

There was a street in Rangoon, the Prince had said, that was named after the old emperor—Mughal Street. Many Indians lived there: the Prince had claimed that there were more Indians than Burmese in Rangoon. The British had brought them there, to work in the docks and mills, to pull rickshaws and empty the latrines. Apparently they couldn't find local people to do these jobs.

. . . The King raised his glasses to his eyes and spotted several Indian faces, along the waterfront. *What vast, what incomprehensible power, to move people in such large numbers from one place to another—emperors, kings, farmers, dockworkers, soldiers, coolies, policemen. Why? Why this furious movement —people taken from one place to another, to pull rickshaws, to sit blindly in exile?*

And where would his own people go, now that they were a part of this empire? It wouldn't suit them, all this moving about. They were not a portable people, the Burmese; he knew this, very well, for himself. He had never wanted to go anywhere. Yet here he was, on his way to India.

(*Glass Palace* 49-50, emphasis mine)

Passages such as these in the *Glass Palace* trace with broad strokes a network of underlying patterns of the colonial machinery. In portraying the exilic experiences across classes of colonised peoples of British India, *Glass Palace* evokes in particular the pervasively unsettling effects of colonial modernity. Within this matrix the repeated image of Bahadur Shah Zafar sitting infirm and blind in exile in Burma emerges as an intensified trope of unreasonable and pathetic dislocation, underlining its excess and futility when viewed outside of the logic of imperial anxiety and interest.

In this saga of Indo-Burmese history spanning over a hundred years, the mobilisation of Indian soldiers across different historical junctures and geographical locations, and the dependence of British imperial control and expansionism on the loyalty of these troops forms a central concern. A core inquiry in the novel revolves around the complex question of the loyalty of Indian soldiers to the British army, one that then is effectively broadened in scope to explore the nature of Indian cooption in the colonial project. The first such reference to the loyalty issue as pertaining to the British Indian Army occurs in the second chapter, while describing the process of the annexation of Mandalay:

The invasion proceeded so smoothly as to surprise even its planners. The imperial fleet crossed the border on 14 November, 1885. Two days later, after a few days of shelling, British soldiers took possession of the Burmese outposts of Nyaungbinmaw and Singbaungwe. . . .

There were some ten thousand soldiers in the British invasion force and of these a majority—about two-thirds—were Indian sepoys. They were from the Hazara Regiment and the 1<sup>st</sup> Madras Pioneers. The Indians were seasoned, battle-hardened troops. The Hazaras, recruited from the Afghan border, had proved their worth to the British over decades of warfare, in India and abroad. The 1<sup>st</sup> Madras Pioneers were among the most loyal of Britain's foot soldiers. They had stood steadfastly by their masters even through the uprising of 1857, when most of northern India had risen against the British. . . .

The war lasted just fourteen days.

*(Glass Palace 26)*



Thus beginning with 1885, the problematic of the loyalty of Indian soldiers to the colonial order resurfaces with reference to 1857 at repeated political junctures in the narrative. In 1929, when Uma Dey's involvement in the Indian Independence League is narrated, the story of the Ghadar Party is recounted:

Among Uma's Indian contemporaries in New York there were many who took their direction from a newsletter published from the University of California, in Berkeley, by Indian students. This publication was called Ghadar, after the Hindustani word for the uprising of 1857. Much of their support came from the Indians who'd settled on the Pacific coast in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of these immigrants were Sikhs—former soldiers of the British Indian army. The experience of living in America and Canada served to turn many of these former loyalists into revolutionaries. Perceiving a link between their treatment abroad and India's subject status, they had become dedicated enemies of the Empire they had once served. (*Glass Palace* 222)

### **'A Moment of Danger' and the Subaltern's Narrative**

Eventually, the most significant reference to 1857 occurs in chapter 36. In the midst of the Second World War, Arjun Roy's battalion, the 1/1 Light Jat Infantry, is stationed in Malaysia, when a Japanese attack thrusts the battalion in the first line of defence. In the first of these skirmishes, the battalion retreats unhurt. Questions arise, variously posed, regarding whose battle it was anyway (the Britishers' or the Indians'), and Lieutenant-Colonel Buckland and Arjun's fellow lieutenant, Hardayal Singh (Hardy) provide counter views, with Arjun standing conflicted between the two. In the next attack, Arjun Roy gets shot in the leg, loses consciousness for a while but is

taken care of and supported by his batman Kishan Singh as he lies concealed and immobile in the damp forest trenches:

Arjun had a sudden premonition of blacking out again, sinking face first into the rainwater, drowning where he lay. In panic he clutched at Kishan Singh, holding on to his arm as though to a life raft.

Kishan Singh, say something. Talk. Don't let me pass out again.'

Talk about what, sah'b?

'I don't care. Just talk, Kishan Singh—about anything. Tell me about your village.'

Hesitantly Kishan Singh began to speak. (*Glass Palace* 428)

Prompted by Arjun Roy, Kishan Singh recounts that his village Kotana near Kurukshetra had a tradition of sending its sons to the army, since the Mutiny.

'The Mutiny?' Arjun recalled Lieutenant-Colonel Buckland's voice, speaking of the same thing. 'What does the Mutiny have to do with it?'

'Sah'b, when I was a boy, the old men of the village used to tell a story. It was about the Mutiny. When the uprising ended and the British re-entered Delhi it came to be known that a great spectacle was to be held in the city. From Kotana a group of elders was deputed to go. They set out at dawn and walked, with hundreds of others, towards the southern postern of the old capital. When they were still far away they saw that the sky above the city was black with birds. The wind carried an odour that grew stronger as they approached the city. The road was straight, the ground level and they could see a long way into the distance. A puzzling sight lay ahead. The road seemed to be lined by troops

of very tall men. It was as though an army of giants had turned out to stand guard over the crowd. On approaching closer, they saw that these were not giants, but men—rebel soldiers whose bodies had been impaled on sharpened stakes. The stakes were arranged in straight lines and led all the way to the city. The stench was terrible. When they returned to Kotana the elders gathered the villagers together. They said, “Today we have seen the face of defeat and it shall never be ours.” From that day on, the families of Kotana decided that they would send their sons to the army of the English sarkar. This is what our fathers told us. I do not know whether this story is true or false, sah'b, but it is what I heard when I was a boy.'

In the confusion of his pain, Arjun had trouble following this. 'What are you saying then Kishan Singh? Are you saying that the villagers joined the army out of fear? But that can't be: No one forced them—or you for that matter. What was there to be afraid of?'

'Sah'b,' Kishan Singh said softly, 'all fear is not the same. What is the fear that keeps us hiding here, for instance? Is it the fear of the Japanese, or is it a fear of the British? Or is it the fear of ourselves, because we do not know who to fear more? Sah'b, a man may fear the shadow of a gun just as much as the gun itself—and who is to say which is the more real?'

For a moment, it seemed to Arjun that Kishan Singh was talking about something very exotic, a creature of fantasy . . . This was the difference, he thought between the other ranks and officers . . . They were destined, like Kishan Singh, to be strangers to themselves, to be directed always by others. But no sooner did this thought take shape in his mind than it was transformed by the delirium of his pain. He had a sudden, hallucinatory vision. Both he and Kishan Singh were in it, but transfigured: they were both lumps of clay,

whirling on potters' wheels. He, Arjun, was the first to have been touched by the unseen potter; a hand had come down on him, touched him, passed over to another; he had been formed, shaped—he had become a thing unto itself—no longer aware of the pressure of the potter's hand, unconscious even that it had come his way. Elsewhere, Kishan Singh was still turning on the wheel, still unformed, damp, malleable mud. It was this formlessness that was the core of his defence against the potter and his shaping touch.

Arjun could not blot out this image from his mind: how was it possible that Kishan Singh—uneducated, unconscious of his motives—should be more aware of the weight of his past than he, Arjun?

'Kishan Singh,' he said hoarsely, 'give me some water.'

...

His mind was inflamed with visions, queries. Was it possible—even hypothetically—that his life, his choices, had always been moulded by fears of which he himself was unaware? He thought back to the past: Lankasuka, Manju, Bela, the hours he had spent sitting on the windowsill, the ecstatic sense of liberation that had come over him on learning that he had been accepted into the Military Academy. Fear had played no part in any of this. He had never thought of his life as different from any other; he had never experienced the slightest doubt about his personal sovereignty; never imagined himself to be dealing with anything less than the full range of human choice. But if it were true that his life had been moulded by acts of power of which he was unaware—then it would follow that he had never acted out his own volition; never had a moment of true self-consciousness.

*(Glass Palace 429-431)*

These passages, from which I have quoted at some length, arguably constitute the ideational crux of the novel, one in which questions of action, subjectivity and power within the colonial situation running through the novel are crystallised. Critically, I suggest that this interchange between Arjun Roy and Kishan Singh evokes resonances of and adapts tropes from the Gita in the Mahabharata in significant ways.<sup>12</sup> This is foremost signalled by the names of the two persons interacting and conversing in this section: batman Kishan Singh and Second Lieutenant Arjun Roy are strongly reflective of the charioteer-god Krishna and the hesitant warrior Arjun on the battlefield of Kurukshetra in the Mahabharata. In a significant twist however, the conversation in Ghosh's novel happens in the midst of battle as Arjun Roy lies injured, and in contrast to the impact of Krishna's delivery of the Bhagvadgita, Kishan Singh's account of his village, the memory of 1857 and his subsequent remarks tend to consolidate doubt and self-reflection in the otherwise largely sanguine Arjun Roy. The question of hesitation on the brink of battle, resolved by Krishna in the epic by an invocation of the *Kshatriya* duty of fighting, is complicated in the novel by raising the question of 'whose battle' this was. This implicit muddying of the waters of a 'right/good battle' in a colonial situation then locates the Second World War within the larger question of the assessment of the nature of participation of Indian troops in colonial battles. The issue of power and stature in the Gita, where the *Kshatriya* duty of Arjun to fight is reinforced by the divine and all-powerful dimensions of Krishna is

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<sup>12</sup> For studies on the central status the Gita assumed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see *Modern Intellectual History* 7. 2 (2010). In the Introduction, Shruti Kapila and Faisal Devji remark on its essential imbrication with modernity: 'Though part of an ancient epic tradition, the Gita did not achieve its current pre-eminence until very recently. Its resurgence and reinterpretation, in short are coterminous with the formation of modern life and politics' (270). For two other essays in the collection relevant to this thesis see Vinayak Chaturvedi's study of Savarkar's invocation of the Gita ("Rethinking Knowledge with Action", 417-435), and Faisal Devji's reading of Gandhi's 1926 discourses on the Gita ("Morality in the Shadow of Politics", 373-390). Relevant to the following discussion of *Glass Palace* here, Devji points out that Gandhi's discourses considered 'any ethical system that relied upon knowledge and choice . . . was either deluded or true only for a very small elite' (373) and also provide an implicit critique of the narcissistic liberal belief in the role of choice and action as one that 'deprived action of its gravity by turning it into one among many options in an endless quest for self-fulfilment' (384).

re-inflected even while it is made central in this section of *Glass Palace*. In an interesting reworking of the special, divine sight given to Arjun by Krishna to enable him to behold his terrifying and magnificent Universal form (the final and clinching argument in the Gita), in the novel a moment of near blackout followed by a hallucinatory experience for Arjun Roy is needed to first create the occasion for conversing with Kishan Singh, and later for correcting Arjun's perception of Kishan Singh as the bearer of an inferior consciousness in comparison to himself and the empowered middle class he represents.

The novel thus conducts a double exploration of the nature of power and hegemonic relations—on the one hand between the colonial power and its Indian subjects, and on the other between the 'modernised' Indian elite and the subaltern classes, represented by Arjun Roy and Kishan Singh respectively. Using the image of the potter's wheel, the hegemonic agency of colonial modernity is seen as having touched and shaped Arjun Roy before Kishan Singh, but the hierarchy of forwardness and backwardness structuring the schema of colonial progress is inverted as Kishan Singh through his narrative of 1857 emerges as the bearer of consciousness of the forces of entry into colonial modernity, while Arjun Roy emerges as the figure of co-option and forgetting. Even as the forces of Enlightenment modernity were meant to be productive of individual autonomy, the liberal ideas of 'sovereignty', 'volition' and 'self-consciousness' are thrown into crisis for Arjun Roy by the end of this crucial section of the novel.

Kishan Singh's mutiny narrative is significant not only for its near surreal depiction of the horrors of the post-revolt retribution, rendering it different from the other 1857 references in the text, it is also distinct because its voicing is completely

incidental. Pressed by Arjun Roy into saying 'something . . . anything' to prevent his lapsing into unconsciousness, Kishan Singh meanders into the mutiny narrative. Arjun Roy is the incidental—almost accidental—prompter of the narrative: he does not actively seek it, in fact he is puzzled that the history of the village's conscription into the army bears any relation with the mutiny, an event that he has heard referred to only by the Lieutenant-Colonel Buckland and in the context of the loyalty of his regiment during 1857.

Strongly suggestive of submerged historical narratives, the determining contexts of dominant colonial political-epistemological formations are foregrounded in this section of *Glass Palace*. The strong imbrication of these formations with linguistic contexts (and thus of the very possibility of communication across the locations of the Anglicised middle class and the common subaltern) is also suggested in a passage just prior to Arjun's conversation with Kishan Singh. Injured and alone with Kishan Singh, Arjun wants to converse with the older man regarding his personal life, his relationship with his wife. However: 'He tried to form the sentences in his head and found he did not know the right words in Hindustani; did not know even the tone of voice in which such questions could be asked. These were things he did not know how to say' (429).

Produced without active interest or design, Kishan Singh's narrative emerges in a moment of crisis and disruption in the seemingly smooth surface of the resolutions of modernity signified by Arjun Roy's consciousness. This links to the problematic of Bengali bhadralok consciousness explored in Ghosh's correspondence with Dipesh Chakrabarty subsequently that year in relation to the issue of denial of colonial

oppression and absence of anguish.<sup>13</sup> The site of Bengali bhadralok consciousness, represented here by Arjun Roy, is arguably in its broader implications a referent for a (precarious, colonial) modernity founded on forgetting.<sup>14</sup>

It is arguable that in this sequence Amitav Ghosh engages polemically with some debates around the work of the Subaltern Studies collective, prefiguring some of the debates that he initiated with Dipesh Chakrabarty later that year. The negotiation of subaltern consciousness has been a theoretical issue raised periodically from within the collective and its intellectual allies.<sup>15</sup> In 1985, Gayatri Spivak in a significant essay, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' brings together a number of these concerns:

All of the accounts of the attempted discursive failures of the group are accounts of failures. For the subaltern displacements, the reason for failure most often given is the much greater scope, organization, and strength of the colonial authorities. In the case of the nationalist movement for independence it is clearly pointed out that the bourgeoisie's 'interested' refusal to recognize the importance of, and to ally themselves with, a politicized peasantry accounted for the failure of the discursive displacement that operated the peasants' politicization. Yet there is also an incipient evolutionism here which, trying

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13 The theme of 1857 as an absence in Bengali experience reappears in Ghosh's following novel, *The Hungry Tide*: 'They drank the Matla's water and worked in the way that matals and madmen work: nothing could stop them, not even the uprising of 1857. If you were here then, on the banks of the Matla, you would never have known that in northern India chapatis were passing from village to village; that Mangal Pandey had turned his gun on his officers; that women and children were being massacred and rebels were being tied to the mouths of the cannon. Here, on the banks of the smiling river, the work continued; an embankment arose, foundations were dug, a strand was laid out, a railway line built.' (*The Hungry Tide*. London: HarperCollins, 2004, 285).

14 This location with its normative, constitutive denials and its potential anguish in a moment of unexpected disruption, is explored also through the character of Gautam Nilambar Dutt in Qurratulain Hyder's *Aag ka Darya/River of Fire*, as I have argued previously.

15 See for instance, Ranajit Guha's "The Prose of Counterinsurgency" (1983), Veena Das's "Subaltern as Perspective" (1989) and Dipesh Chakrabarty's "Radical Histories and Question of Enlightenment Rationalism: Some Recent Critiques of *Subaltern Studies*" (1995).



perhaps to avoid a vulgar Marxist glorification of the peasant, lays the blame on 'the existing level of peasant consciousness' for the fact 'that peasant solidarity and peasant power were seldom sufficient or sustained enough'. This contradicts the general politics of the group –which sees the elite's hegemonic access to 'consciousness' as an interpretable construct.

(Spivak 333)

Ghosh's depiction of the dynamic of Kishan Singh and Arjun Roy then appears to interrogate some of these constitutive binds of Subaltern historiography in relation to colonialism and consciousness. Resistance in Ghosh's treatment still focuses on consciousness, but reverses the defining bias of Subaltern Studies (the constitutive hierarchy of elite and subaltern consciousness), without romanticising 'peasant consciousness'. Kishan Singh's intergenerationally transmitted narrative of 1857 appearing in a moment of crisis: 'Today we have seen the face of defeat . . .' (430), signals the nature of difference between the two consciousnesses. Kishan Singh's narrative registers 'survival/resistance within the conqueror's terms', while Arjun Roy's discourse, till his moment of epiphany denies such constitutive capitulation. The difference is then between degrees of cooption, with Arjun Roy emerging as possibly 'more subaltern' in terms of consciousness. Another significant and related rupture of the dominant discourse of Subaltern Studies that this sequence effects is that it destabilises the notion that political peasant experience is narratable only as a narrative that casts peasants as actors in insurrection (albeit doomed to failure). Instead Kishan Singh's narrative foregrounds the other historical possibility—a clear-eyed cooption in extremis—within post-1857 experience.

Overall then, the experiences and possibilities of the exilic form a critical constellation of theme and meaning in Ghosh's *Glass Palace*, most fecundly evoked through references to the rebellion of 1857. The underlying theme of this epic novel, the 'incomprehensible power [of the imperial state], to move people in such large numbers from one place to another' (50), finds its particular and most poignant expression in the figure of Bahadur Shah Zafar transported to Rangoon after the rebellion, 'sit[ting] blindly in exile' (50). From this early image in the novel, the references to 1857 culminate in the epiphanic battlefield exchange between Arjun Roy and Kishan Singh. In this elaboration, I read the development of the initial trope of 'sitting blindly in exile' into an extended figure exploring colonial modernity and its attendant rifts and displacements, expanding literal exiles in the wake of the rebellion into questions regarding exile from the self for the 'fully formed' modern subject, here signified by Arjun Roy. As issues of 'sovereignty', 'volition' and 'self-consciousness' are thrown into crisis with the suggestion of Arjun being the site of historical forgetting, Kishan Singh emerges as the unexpected bearer of the traces of memory. The disruption of the 'normal' vision of Arjun Roy in the hallucinatory/revelatory experience he has thus functions as a figure for (in)sight in opposition to 'sitting blindly in exile', where exile is a trope for modernity.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the phenomenon of the narration of 1857 in postcolonial Indian subcontinental writing as an exilic one. While the rebellion is not the patent subject of any of the three texts considered here, it gets elaborated in the form of recurrent images, leitmotifs and submerged narratives. Most significantly, 1857 recurs as a critical moment for the renegotiation of questions of modernity and its

constitutive political and discursive structures. Memory of 1857 in each of these novels is constitutively imbricated with narrative, particularly in the Benjaminian sense of oral, intergeneration transmission. The three contrapuntal narratives in these novels—Zakir's in *Basti*, Nawab Kamman's in *River of Fire*, and Kishan Singh's in *Glass Palace*—are all produced within the frame of the incidental and the conversational. Reminiscence, anecdote, reverie and even delirium appear as the modes of accessing a continuum of experience constitutively denied by mainstream narratives of modernity, nationalisation and minoritisation. Further each of these narratives is produced in a Benjaminian 'moment of danger':

To articulate the past does not mean to recognise it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger.

(VI "Theses on the Philosophy of History", *Illuminations* 247)

This then is the sense in which the novels in which these narratives occur exist in a contrapuntal relation to dominant knowledge formations, visibilised in Nawab Kamman's literary register unknown to Gautam Narayan Dutt, and in the marginality of Kishan Singh's 1857 narrative to the cognitive world inhabited by Arjun Roy. *Basti* evokes the writerly role in generating this contrapuntal narrative, a point reinforced by the rewriting in *River of Fire*, in which the authorial investment in narrating 1857 (evident in the considerably expanded textual space devoted to this as compared to *Aag ka Darya*) can be read as a metatextual reflection of Nawab Kamman's loquacity and the imperative to bring to record narratives of the rebellion unregistered by mainstream colonial and postcolonial culture. Comparably, through his engagement

with the scope and nature of subaltern narrative in the face of liberal knowledge formations and historiography, including the influential one of the Subaltern historians, Amitav Ghosh exemplifies contrapuntality as being 'at its most expansive . . . an argument about the nature of culture in the modern era' (Mufti, "Global Comparativism" 115). The 'resounding silence about 1857' identified by Ghosh then emerges as a sign of the constitutive conditions of liberal knowledge formations and reveals the literary-political history of the creation of submerged and inaudible narratives.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has come to a conclusion without attending to the standard polemic regarding nomenclature that has historically accompanied discourses about 1857 revolving around the alternative terminology of 'mutiny', 'revolt' and 'war of independence'.<sup>1</sup> Determining the character of the events of this period has been a favoured topic for historians from the nineteenth century onwards. As Gautam Chakravarty has pointed out, 'the clearest evidence of the difficulty of interpreting the rebellion lay in the search for, and the quarrel over, a rubric that would signify the event in its totality' (23). At the other end of the semantic spectrum, Dipesh Chakrabarty wrote in 2007 that '1857 came to be codified into a general form of insurrection' and that 'by this code, 1857 is simply an incitement to popular politics, a call to insurgency' ("Remembering 1857", 1695). It is interesting to note that the first state-sponsored history in independent India, written by S.N. Sen and published in the centenary year was titled, quite simply "Eighteen Fifty-Seven", manifesting a careful avoidance of the burden of descriptive nomenclature. This avoidance was however configured in the framework of historical 'objectivity', an aspiration that in its Rankean empiricism and inherited colonial judicial discourse tended to particularly constrict the potential of post-colonial histories of the revolt, as I have discussed in the Introduction.

The reason why this thesis has not concerned itself with nomenclature (though it has obviously employed one rather than other terms: 'revolt') is that one of my primary concerns has been to trace the overarching elements of continuity and

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1 See for instance Ronojoy Sen's "Indian Historians and the Debate over the Uprising" : 'Were the events of 1857 a mutiny or a war of independence? That is one of the questions that undergraduate history students of Calcutta University still have to contend with' (12).

repetition between colonial, anti-colonial and post-colonial narratives. The striking repeatability of the colonial mutiny narrative, its historical and discursive intransigence has been one of the constant engagements in these chapters. Indeed as I have argued in Chapter 3, the text widely understood to be inaugural of the Indian narrative, V.D. Savarkar's 1857, *The Indian War of Independence* (1909) reveals the most patent dependence on and proximity to nineteenth century mutiny narratives. In this context, it has been the interest of this thesis to probe the elisions of nomenclature and establish the discursive and political continuities between texts and discourses constituted as oppositional in dominant historiography and scholarly reception.

In particular, this thesis has sought to trace the historical and discursive elements of the repeatability of the mutiny narrative. Of these, the most significant is the constitutive myth of the 'silent native'. The difficulty of accessing 'native' thoughts on the rebellion, while finding repeated expression in colonial histories, is hardly supported by the actual existence and contents of texts like Syed Ahmad Khan's *Causes*. Instead the long and troubled history of the reception of this text (and its author) reveals that the 'silent native' was far more the effect of imperial desires and anxiety than historical fact. The wresting of the British mutiny narrative by Savarkar in 1909 signals the first major recasting and continuance of this trope of 'difficulty of access'. As I have suggested in Chapter Three, for Savarkar's history, discursively close to imperial histories and ideologically influenced by European fascist ideas, the substantive 'other' is the as yet unwritten 'real' history which will involve 'a patriotic historian' going to northern India and collecting narratives from eye-witnesses, a task not attempted by Savarkar but delegated and deferred as an abstraction. Further, the possibility of this spectral, 'authentic' history materialising is bounded by the articulation of the idea of its being 'too late', and of the trope of disappeared and

disappearing generations. I read this as an early expression of a complex of notions repeated across subsequent Indian negotiations of the revolt: the idea of an unwritten history in relation to which all executed histories stand in a position of necessary ad-hocism, framed by the trope of disappeared and disappearing generations. Yet, if on the one hand the anxiety of the absence of oral narratives has marked the perennially receding horizon of a truly Indian history of 1857, the quest for the recovery of such narratives has tended to be heavily challenged by continuing deference to canonical published sources, and by a constitutive investment in 'modernity' and 'progress' that has failed to negotiate the idea of the 'traditional' and the 'folk' in mainstream discursive practice.<sup>2</sup> As I have shown in the final section of Chapter Three, Amritlal Nagar's quest in the centenary year is an example of such, amounting to a second or third order creation of the 'silent native'. In the tracing of this morphing trope of the silent native, the thesis has attempted a nuanced treatment of silence in which the primary implication of silence as an absence in speech and writing is qualified by political and discursive conditions of 'audibility'. In foregrounding the speech of Ibn-ul-Vaqt in Nazir Ahmad's novel and the narrative of Kishan Singh in Amitav Ghosh's, the thesis has raised the question of the constitutive conditions of power and knowledge that determine discursive presence. It has also touched upon the

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2 Some better known projects of oral retrieval include the work of P.C. Joshi, anti-imperial activist, and the first general secretary of the Communist Party of India (1935-47). Joshi's archive of folk songs relating to the rebellion was published in 1994, but remains essentially a collative act. Joshi remarks: 'The folk songs are not very reliable for historical details. . . . Their main and supreme value lies in the fact that they constitute a very authentic record of the outlook of the people they portray. . . . With their help one can handle the British source material more competently and confidently' (Joshi 9). The emphasis is on the confidence building potential of this archive, and details of an alternative historiography are left diffuse. More recently, Badri Narayan's work on the appropriation and fashioning of narratives of Dalit heroes of 1857 for the political success of the Bahujan Samaj Party, while an important documentation of contemporary socio-political forces in North India, suffers from an unproblematised identification with the political project Narayan studies. Also, in its support for a patently instrumentalist use of 1857, Narayan's vocabulary is disturbingly reminiscent of the Savarkarite generation of essentialised binaries. He writes in the conclusion to his book *Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India* (2006): 'These new histories of the Dalit culture of dissent . . . are being written and transmitted by the BSP help to demarginalise the Dalits. . . . In this process, the Dalits also strengthen their own identities, thereby acquiring self-confidence . . . . Two main objectives of the BSP, visible in the language of political mobilisation, are to develop a homogenous identity among the fragmented Dalit castes, and to inject and encourage *necessary feelings of hatred for and fear of* the upper castes . . . .' (172, emphases mine).

complicated dynamic of silence and amnesia in the question of remembering 1857, in which silence gets repeatedly posited as a political substitute for and projection of a desirable 'forgetting'.

In my approach to memory, as discussed in some detail in the Introduction, I have rejected any notion of 'memory' and 'history' as referring to parallel or opposed categories. While as a critical tool, memory provides a conceptual counter to the 'rectilinearity' of received histories, at the same time in a necessarily related position memory *is* constitutively a distinctly historical product. Also, one of the main focuses of the thesis has been to query the idea of memory of 1857 as an object of positivistic retrieval. This is for one because 'facts' or 'empirical' knowledge as they are conventionally understood are less of a lacuna as compared to the difficulty of a discursive locus that makes alternative narratives possible.<sup>3</sup> Secondly even as it is invested in reading literary and polemical texts as a fecund site for issues of historical memory, this thesis has emphasized that literary forms and practices are not themselves de-historicised sites and productions existing in 'empty homogeneous time' (Benjamin) but are imbricated in their cultural and intellectual matrices. Chapters One and Two, dealing directly with nineteenth century Urdu literary production, particularly suggest that to even access some of these forms, practices and texts is a task of negotiating the 'strange' while being aware of the historically produced nature of strangeness. In this I have drawn from Aamir Mufti's observation that 'the pre-modern corpus can only be approached from a position of *exile* from it' (*Enlightenment* 19). There is a complex response regarding the revolt and its

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3 For two recent publications using archival material and dealing with 'the way ordinary people carried on with their lives during this traumatic period' (Llewellyn-Jones xv), see *The Great Uprising in India, 1857-58* (2007) and also Mahmood Farooqui's valuable collative work *Besieged: Voices from Delhi 1857* (2010). Also see Kim Wagner's *The Great Fear of 1857* (2010) for a study of rumours and conspiracies. The challenge for micro-narratives remains to be able to negotiate with and potentially unsettle the terms of established 'Histories', rather than exist only as parallel discourses.



aftermath to be garnered for instance from reading *Fughan-e-Dehli*, but one that requires a mediation of historically contingent and loaded political ideas such as 'loyalism' as well as a nuanced understanding of literary conventions and their evolution (such as 'lament'), here sought be studied with reference to the long and variegated history of the shahr ashob.

In general, the methodological impetus behind positing a web of varied texts in most of the chapters has been to destabilise the more or less univocal and uni-layered tendencies of 1857 narratives, and instead provide a thick narrative reflecting the mutual constitution of memory, history and literature. This thick narrative is generated partly through the tracing of historical and contemporary dialogues, such as Syed Ahmad Khan's with W.W. Hunter or Amitav Ghosh's with Dipesh Chakrabarty, and the pursuance of radial conversations from these. Partly I have attempted to do this through the foregrounding of literary production as not simply a space for the reflection of historical events anterior to it, but equally as a textual product subject to the defining processes of history and politics. In this dialectic the fortunes of literary texts emerge as an identifiably dynamic component in the consolidation of historical memory, an argument made at some length with reference to Nazir Ahmad's *Ibn-ul-Vaqt*.

This thesis has also attempted to trace the figuration of 1857 in relation to questions of modernity. While figured as an arch instance of anti-colonial insurrection in modern India, and thus eminently usable in nationalist reflections, 1857 is overlaid by the assumptions of Enlightenment discourse, according to which it is constituted as primarily a nodal point consolidating an entry into a desirable colonial modernity attendant with the promises of colonial progress. I have suggested that the liberal

remembering of the revolt in India, for which Nehru's narrations of the nation offer an influential paradigm, thus tends to be attended by a conflict between the containment, even exorcism, of 1857 as a pre-modern past on the one hand, and its emergence as the site for the posing of unresolved questions regarding the nature of Indian modernity on the other. In this context, 1857 recurs in contemporary writing as a critical moment for the renegotiation of questions of modernity and its constitutive political-discursive structures. Overlaid by the resolutions of modernity and progress however, memory of 1857 is best described in the Adornian terms of 'things . . . fallen by the wayside', not quite assimilated into the 'rectilinear' narrative of victory and defeat (*Minima Moralia* 151).

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